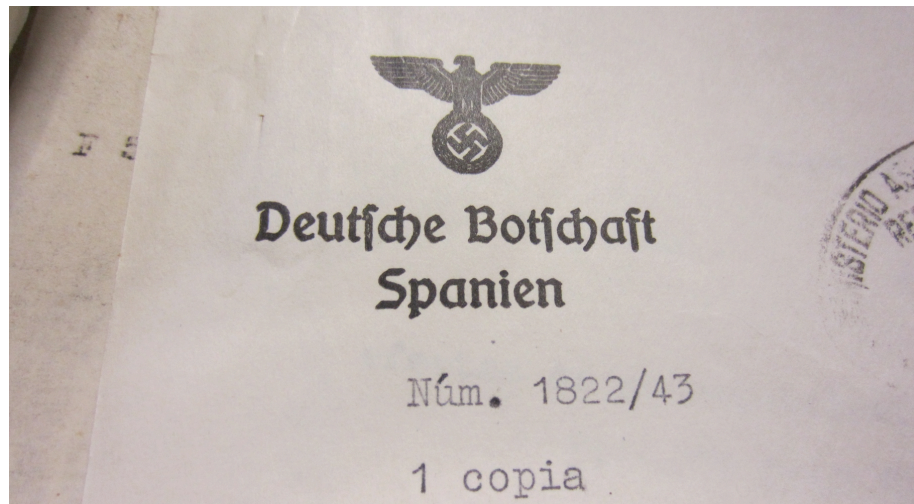


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Durham, North Carolina



*Archival Document: "German embassy in Spain"*

# **Franco's Spain and the Jewish Rescue Effort During World War Two**

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To my family, who has always supported me in everything I do

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## **Abstract**

Although a little known fact, Spanish diplomats helped save many of their own Sephardic (Spanish) Jews during World War Two. Three Spanish diplomats in three different locales – Bernardo Rolland in Paris, Sebastián Romero Radigales in Greece, and Julio Palencia in Bulgaria – made surprising and systematic efforts to save the Sephardim from the Nazis. Why was Spain, a fascist country and German ally, helpful to Jews during the war? This question lies at the heart of my investigation, and this paper will suggest some possible reasons for this historical conundrum.

Spain's expulsion of the Jews in 1492 provides a historical locus from which to consider several implications that emerge closer to WWII. The fact of individual diplomats acting on their own is equally important in speculating about possible reasons for inconsistent application of Spanish government policy. The behavior of these diplomats probably reflected considerations of modern Spanish national identity, which is intertwined with Spanish Jewry. Furthermore, the majority of diplomats came from the higher echelons of society who had class, cultural, and educational affinities with the Sephardim, creating empathy, which may account for the life-saving actions. The fact that Franco did not establish a clear agenda for his diplomats or an institutionalized training system prior to 1942 accounts for the flexibility granted to these diplomats, which they, in turn, used to save many Sephardim. The 1942 institutionalization of the diplomatic corps was Franco's attempt to correct this problem and to create a cohort of diplomats that was an extension of his regime with the same ideological leanings.

My primary source research in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Spain helps to shed light on this historical puzzle, itself a reminder of the importance of recognizing contingency and competing interests in historiography.

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## Introduction

### Mireille's Vignette

“What do you think was in this box?” the graying elderly woman sitting across from me asks, a hint of amusement flashing in her inquisitive brown eyes. She leans towards me from across the table, revealing a small, slightly rusting tin (see figure 1). I discern some sort of symmetrical pattern weaving its way across the top of the tin, two foreign words, indecipherable to me, appear both above and below the design.

Mireille, noticing that I have mentally left the apartment on a trip entirely within the recesses of my memory, draws me back to reality by prompting me further. “A few people say tobacco. Maybe originally, my father was smoker. But here we are on the road and we don’t know if we’ll ever come back. Most likely not. And my mother has one small suitcase. What would a family of four take on a journey for an uncertain number of days? Money? No we weren’t rich, we didn’t have much money. Photographs? Although I loved my family that wasn’t essential survival stuff.” Noting my blank face, she answers her own question – “This was my mother’s sewing kit so she kept her needles and threads to replace buttons and holes and darn socks.” I am profoundly struck by the story of this tin and how it seems to serve as the perfect metaphor of Mireille’s life. Just as this tin was reutilized for different purposes, reappropriated as an object – its origins occluded, its location shifted, its language redefined – so too was Mireille

labeled as a Jew, a Polish Jew, a French Jew, forced to cross numerous borders, unsure of her identity and place. Mireille's life on the run, the very pattern of her life, seemed to be completely symbolized by this curious tin.



Figure 1: Tobacco tin. *Source:* my personal picture.

She outlines of her family's escape, constructing her narrative not only out of her own direct memories but also from what her parents told her. She first describes her childhood life of being part of poor immigrant family in France that had moved to find a better life outside of impoverished and wildly anti-Semitic Poland. The kindness of strangers is a central theme to the

story she tells me, and she highlights the kind officer who permitted her soldier-father to leave his post upon France's imminent surrender to the Germans due to the danger he and his Jewish family faced in light of capitulation. She describes her family's luck once again, and how they caught the "last train from Paris" before the surrender, the name of her short story she wrote on this topic.

Mireille's family rented a truck and drove towards the Pyrenees and after some time arrived in the small city of Perpignan, which is about 100 kilometers from the Spanish border. Once in Spain her family traveled first to Barcelona. It is important to note that Mireille's family, and all other Jews (including those of Spanish nationality) were deemed "in transit" and given only thirty days to use Spain as a means of transit to another, more permanent destination. Thus, from Barcelona Mireille's family traveled to Lisbon, Portugal, which marked the end of their journey by land. Mireille's saga continued by sea, and her family embarked on a Greek merchant steamer that was part of a convoy. After three weeks of dodging U-boats and torpedoes across the Atlantic, in somewhat of a miracle, Mireille's family arrived in America on August 11, 1940 (see figure 2).

In terms of visas and documentation, Mireille's father's American family helped her family to get papers along before World War Two broke out. Because of the system of extremely limited Polish immigration to the United States, Mireille and her sister were registered as part of

the French quota (they had been declared French nationals at birth). Her father, Polish by birth, was issued a Nansen passport. These passports, named after the Norwegian diplomat in the League of Nations, were issued to Russians seeking to escape the Reds/Bolshevism. HIAS<sup>1</sup> (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) processed their papers and housed them upon their arrival to New York, where Mireille has lived ever since.



Figure 2: Escape route to Spain of Mireille's family. *Source:* my personal picture.

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<sup>1</sup>Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was founded in 1881 to help ease the exodus of Jewish emigrants from Russia. HIAS assists Jews and other groups of people whose lives and freedom are believed to be at risk to relocate.

Mireille finishes her story and after a few moments, I choose to break the silence. “So why Spain?” She hesitates, “we’re allowed to travel through Spain. I never asked my father why Spain and not Switzerland. It never occurred to me to ask...” She pauses, I relish the fact that my question makes her think, think more about something that she has thought about constantly for her entire life. She continues on, more matter of fact now, “but we’re not allowed to stay in Spain. We’re in transit Jews. Franco apparently accepted a great deal of money from refugees in transit. We are part of many thousands who transferred through Spain. We get into Portugal...the arrangements were made that we join a convoy on a Greek freighter and we traveled three weeks across the north Atlantic during which the submarine bombings which is why we were part of a convoy.”

Mireille’s experience is not just remarkable for her tale of fortunate circumstances nor is it an anomaly in the case of other Jews, French or otherwise, in mid-twentieth century Europe. Spain retained binding ties with its own Spanish Jews, the Sephardim. Sephardim, which literally means “people of Spain,” comes from the Hebrew word *Sefarad* (סְפָרַד), which is a biblical location. The word *Sefarad* appears in the biblical book of Obadiah and has meant “Spain” since the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> The names of France and Spain in Hebrew are both misnomers that come

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<sup>2</sup>John Efron, Joshua Holo, Mattjias Lehmann, Steven Weitzman, *The Jews, A History* (Saddlebrook, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 178.



from the extension of earlier prophecies made in the Bible. These strange names come from a prophecy in *Amos*, chapter nine in which a promise is made about redemption and the return of the Jewish Diaspora. Around the ninth century, the Jews of Spain interpreted these prophecies to mean the return of the Jewish Diaspora to Spain. This term was used to describe Jews originating from the Iberian Peninsula, namely Spain and Portugal. The Ashkenazi<sup>3</sup> Jews are a second category of Jews that differ from the Sephardim. These two types of Jews have distinctive liturgic and religious-legal traditions and are quite different from each other.<sup>4</sup>

Today in 2013, an estimated 250,000 Sephardic Jews exist and some still speak a form of *Ladino*, an archaic Jewish Spanish dialect that permits the Sephardim to communicate with Spanish speakers in Mexico, Columbia, Argentina, and Chile without difficulty.<sup>5</sup> The most numerous Sephardic community resides in Israel and many Sephardim still live in Turkey.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The term Ashekanz appears in the bible books of Genesis, Chronicles, and Jeremiah. Specifically Ashkenazi comes from the biblical figure of Ashkenaz, son of Yefet (Genesis 10). This terminology results from the effort to find a biblical reference to the lands newly inhabited by Jews; geography depicted in Genesis was identified with parts of Europe. The notion of genealogy acquired special resonance in the late Middle Ages when migration from Germany to the East occurred and was applied especially to the Rhineland: Efron, *The Jews*, 178.

<sup>4</sup> Efron, *The Jews, A History*, 178.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Perez, *Los Judíos en España* (Madrid, España: Marcial Pons Historia, 2005), 279.

<sup>6</sup> Miguel Ángel Nieto, *El Último Sefardí, el legado oral de los judíos expulsados de España en 1492* (Madrid, España: Calamar Edición, 2003), 10.

Many of these Sephardic communities only assimilated into larger society over the course of the last generation, which demonstrates their lasting ties and commitment to their Spanish culture.

However, Mireille, an Ashkenazi rather than Sephardic Jew, had no ties to Spain. Yet she was permitted to pass through to receive refuge. It is this aspect of Mireille's background, her Ashkenazi or Eastern European rather than Spanish roots that makes her story not only extraordinary but also illustrative of a trend of Spain's extension of aid to the Jews. The Francoist right wing held some negative stereotypes of the Jews such as the belief that the Jews had disproportionate international clout and that the Jews were in control of the Allies. But the vicious anti-Semitic ideology that permeated Central Europe in the twentieth century, which during the late eighteenth was liberal in granting the Jews citizenship, never took hold in Spain.

Mireille's story demonstrates a central theme to the historical circumstances of World War Two – one of irony. My thesis concentrates on the examples of three Spanish diplomats and their efforts to help Sephardic Jews in World War Two escape Nazi-controlled territory by issuing them visas to travel from their homes through Spain to safe territory. In the words of Diego Carcedo, a contemporary scholar on the subject, “in different capitals, other Spanish diplomats, although not all of them, jumped over strictly established rules and acted flexibly by taking actions outside of their responsibility such as issuing visas and letters of nationality when

they saw any possibility to do so.”<sup>7</sup> Remarkably, considering that they officially represented a nation friendly to Germany, many Spanish diplomats actively attempted to protect Spanish and non-Spanish Jews both in and outside of their domain.

Bernardo Rolland, the Spanish Consul General in Paris, used his jurisdiction to grant visas to many Sephardim and evacuate them from France. Rolland also fought the *Statutes des Juifs*, adopted in Vichy France in 1940-41. This set of laws discriminated in various ways against French Jews in an effort to differentiate them from the rest of the French populace. Rolland’s efforts succeeded in 1942 when it became impossible for Vichy authorities to confiscate the Sephardim’s property. Near the French-Spanish border, Spanish diplomats in France ignored the instructions of the Spanish government in Madrid with respect to the Sephardim under their domain. Although Germany coerced Franco into closing the French-Spanish border for a period of time towards the end of 1942, there are many cases of visas being issued for Spanish Jews attempting to cross this border. Moreover, numerous complaints were filed over what was deemed diplomatic insubordination.

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<sup>7</sup>En diferentes capitales, otros diplomáticos españoles, aunque por supuesto no todos, se saltaban las normas mas estrictas y flexibilizaban su actitud mas allá de sus competencias concediendo visados y cartas de nacionalidad cuando veían alguna posibilidad de hacerlo (pg. 164). All English translations in this paper are by the author from original Spanish.

At a greater geographical distance from Spain, it was easier for Spanish diplomats to push the limits of the Franco regime's authority. Sebastián Romero de Radigales, the Spanish Consul General in Greece, took personal measures to save 500-600 Sephardim. Radigales proposed numerous and innovative repatriation plans to Madrid, which demonstrated his concerted efforts to save the Spanish Jews in any way possible. One such plan included providing entry visas for Spanish Jews to either Spain or Morocco.<sup>8</sup> He also petitioned the Spanish government for help on behalf of the Sephardim in Salonika (the largest Jewish community in Greece), and successfully persuaded Germany to agree to allow repatriation of these Jews to Spain. Franco's regime failed to follow through and save all of these Jews at the very last moment, but that slippage was out of Radigales' control.

The case of Julio Palencia, Minister of the Spanish Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria, is particularly intriguing. His strong pro-Jewish sentiments earned him the nickname "the well known friend of the Jews" in German correspondence.<sup>9</sup> Palencia, who had established contact with the Sephardic community of Bulgaria prior to these measures, took the approach that "in

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<sup>8</sup> The Spanish protectorate of Morocco was the area of Morocco under colonial rule by the Spanish empire. This protectorate was established by the Treaty of Fez in 1912 and ended in 1956, when both France and Spain recognized Moroccan independence. During World War Two, many Spanish bureaucrats suggested sending Sephardim to this protectorate, some successfully and others not: see Haim Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974), 150.

<sup>9</sup> Chaim U. Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Ktav Publishing House, 1984), 66.

Spain citizens of different categories classified for ethnic or religious reasons do not exist”<sup>10</sup> and considered the Sephardim to have special ties to Spain.<sup>11</sup> There are many examples of Palencia appealing to the Spanish government for humanitarian reasons on behalf of the Jews. Most notably, Palencia surprised even his diplomatic colleagues by adopting the imperiled children of a Sephardic. By doing so, Palencia took an extreme risk and stuck his neck out past the point of impunity; this action proved too much for the foreign ministry in Madrid and resulted in his removal from his diplomatic post.

In these three cases, Spanish diplomats made repeated and systematic efforts to save Sephardic Jews from the Nazis. And they were not the only ones who acted in such ways. Estimates vary widely regarding the number of Jews saved by Spanish efforts. Yad Vashem, Israel’s World Center for Holocaust Research, conservatively estimates 30,000 Sephardim saved by Spain, while U.S. congressman Abraham J. Multer, a U.S. congressman from New York from 1947-77 with a strong interest in Jewish affairs, approximates the number at closer to 60,000.<sup>12</sup> Historians Haim Avni and Bernd Rother have variously estimated the number of Jews escaping

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<sup>10</sup> “La condición de raza o de religión de estas personas no cuenta en nuestra legislación nacional.” : Federico Ysart. *España y los judíos en la segunda guerra mundial: testimonio de actualidad* (Barcelona, Spain: Dopesa, 1973) 129.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 142.

over the Pyrenees, the mountainous border between France and Spain; Avni suggests 23,000, while Rother puts the number between 20,000-35,000.<sup>13</sup>

Given the widespread nature of these diplomatic interventions, more systematic explanations are called for, even if they can only be suggested rather than definitely shown. These actions represent a methodical rescue effort, which reflects not merely an individual moral stance, but rather something influenced by a national and cultural rationale connected with the Spanish identity. This is particularly intriguing because members of an international diplomatic community are often more likely to avoid strong action and upsetting the fine balance of things.

The way in which nationalism occurred within Spain as well as the fact that Sephardic Jewish communities abroad were comprised of individuals of Spanish origin may have contributed to the development of this paradigm. Furthermore, the distinction between Franco and his diplomats must be emphasized. Franco, on the one hand, is somewhat of a human riddle. He was on record as having made a number of anti-Semitic comments and yet these remarks were never translated in to actual policies. Whatever stereotypes Spaniards held about the Jews, Franco's regime never instituted a consistent racial and anti-Semitic policy. In a time where no country in Europe wanted to claim its Jews, Spain proclaimed the Jews Spaniards and took

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<sup>13</sup>Josep Calvet. *Las montañas de la libertad: El paso de refugiados por los pirineos durante la segunda guerra mundial 1939-1944* (Madrid, Spain: Alianza Editorial, 2008), 137.

partial accountability for them. Instead, it is clear that during much of the time of these diplomats' pro-Sephardic activity, there was a vacuum of centralized leadership and instructions which allowed Spanish diplomats to take actions without the full consent of Franco but, also for the most part, with impunity. The types of violations committed by these diplomats against Spanish orders demonstrate the bounds of power within a loose and far-flung bureaucratic system, operating with limited communications technology. Embassy letters and other official documents illustrate just how far a Spanish diplomat could go before facing repercussions. These diplomats used euphemisms and feigned misunderstandings. They also skirted issues and pretended to be compliant with official Spanish policy while often acting directly in opposition to the Spanish government's demands.

Why was the Spanish government helpful to Jews on any level during World War Two? How strange it is that those countries with Catholic cultures, such as Italy, which continued to entertain a set of anti-Jewish attitudes failed to develop modern racial anti-Semitism. The Jews of Europe actually survived World War Two the longest in fascist regimes. Part of the reason for this was the fact that Jews are a testament to Christian truths and are inextricably linked to the history of Christianity; Judaism and the Old Testament are the grounds for the entire Christian religion. This is the major different between the majority of fascist regimes and National

Socialism; National Socialism sought to cut this historic yet problematic relationship. So, while Germany laid claim to a racial ideology, Spain never quite did.

Spain's cultural and historical ties with its Sephardim played a vital role in shaping its attitude towards the Jews. While Spain retained a set of Catholic stereotypes about the Jews, it remained largely impervious to the racialization of Jews seen in the majority of other countries in Europe during this time period. Paradoxically, the descendants of the Jews who were once forced out of Spain by the Edict of Expulsion of 1492 specifically received protection from Spanish diplomats during the Holocaust era.

It's important to recognize just how surprising this activity was, considering that Franco's Spain, along with another fascist government, Mussolini's Italy, were very closely associated with Hitler's Germany. It is fascinating to consider how the two fascist pariahs of the western world which were most closely associated with Nazi Germany—Italy and Spain—made some of the greatest efforts to save their own Jews. This realization truly turns the conventional notion of twentieth century Western Europe on its head. I'd like to explore some possible reasons for this historical conundrum. One possibility: it might be influenced by modern Spanish national identity, which is intertwined with Spanish Jewry. Perhaps Spanish diplomats felt a personal sense of shame regarding Spain's Expulsion of the Jews in 1492 as representatives abroad of a country with a very problematic and shameful history. Due to their country's indefensible action



in the past, maybe they hoped to do their part to avoid another wrongdoing to these Spanish Jews in modernity, when they now had the power to do so.

In this way, the Jews seemingly became symbols of Spanish national pride and a symbolic people in terms of power plays with Germany. This symbolism is linked to a variety of ideas, one of which is the Jews as a symbol of self-making and self-fashioning similar to Franco's ideology surrounding the self-fashioning of his own unique and exceptional regime. Thus, Spanish nationalism was a useful tool used by diplomats to push their agendas and assert their right to the save the Sephardim.

Archival documents and secondary source literature give the impression that these diplomats from a nationalist, fascist state held the idea that *Spanish* fascism had its own ideologies independent of the national socialism of Nazi Germany. Spanish diplomats were greatly impacted by Spanish nationalism, specifically their professional role in protecting Spanish subjects and citizens. This motivated their life-saving actions. While fascists are often lumped in the same conglomerate, both Spain and Italy's fascisms differed drastically from Germany's National Socialism form of fascism. One of the most important ideological differences lay in Franco's ambivalent attitude towards the Jews and the opportunistic way in which he used them. For Franco, the Jews were not a major focus. Economic problems plagued Spain and this agenda took precedence over most everything else. This was, of course,

compounded by the fact that the Spaniards did not possess a vicious form of anti-Semitism to play on as the Nazis did. Connected to this idea is the fact that it is hard to have a “Jewish problem” in a country that has virtually no Jews.

## **Historiography**

Numerous scholars have tirelessly studied the topic of Spanish aid to the Jews during World War Two and have offered a wide range of opinions, ideas, and insights. The chronological trend in these writings reveals a pattern: the earlier works, written in the 1970s, praise Franco’s Spain and attempt to reveal a new side of Spain to the rest of the world. For instance, both Chaim Lipchitz (*Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 1984), an American rabbi, and Federico Ysart (*España y los judíos en la segunda guerra mundial: testimonio de actualidad*, 1973), present Franco’s regime in a positive fashion. While Lipchitz blames Spain’s severe economic crisis for limiting Franco’s rescue activities, Ysart goes so far as to assert that “the name of Spain is one of the few lights that shines in the long and dark of night which the Jewish community lived through during the tragic years of Nazism.”<sup>14</sup> These notions went

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<sup>14</sup>“El nombre de España es una de las poquísimas luces que brillan en la larga y oscura noche que vivió el pueblo judío durante los trágicos años del nazismo” (pg. 10).

against the generally held conception of Spain as a pro-Axis authoritarian regime held by both Israel and the Western world following World War Two.

Later works, written in eras following the death of Franco and the opening of governmental archives, offer a harsher portrayal of Franco's actions and typically argue that Franco was motivated by self-interest and could have helped Jewish refugees more. Haim Avni (*Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 1974) calls into question the notion that the Franco regime did everything in its power to save the Jews. Later, in 2005 German Bernd Rother (*Franco y el Holocausto*) makes clear that the Franco regime could have done much more to aid Jewish refugees. Isabel Rohr (*The Spanish right and the Jews, 1989-1945: anti-Semitism and opportunism*, 2007) extends this argument with a more direct nuance; the general consensus is that Franco acted opportunistically in its interactions with the Jews.

The two most recent books written about this subject by Spaniards themselves offer the most negative presentation of Franco's regime while elevating the work of Spanish diplomats. These works written by Eduardo Martín de Pozuelo (*El Franquismo, Cómplice Del Holocausto y otros episodios desconocidos de la dictadura*, 2012) and Diego Carcedo (*Entre bestias y héroes: Los Españoles que plantaron cara al Holocausto*, 2011) both use hidden and destroyed documents to argue that Franco was complicit in the Holocaust and that any altruistic aid offered to Jews by Spanish diplomats was done without Spain's genuine support.

My thesis raises a question not been raised before, asking why the subject of systematic Spanish diplomatic aid has not been broached. While definitive answers cannot be provided by this thesis alone, these questions surrounding this historical phenomenon will never be answered without presenting and examining potential reasons for this diplomatic aid.

### **Central Research Questions**

Due to the large gaps in the historiography of my subject, my research raises numerous questions that my archival and secondary research attempts to answer. Why did the Spanish suddenly come to view the Sephardim as Spaniards? Why did Spanish diplomats go out of their way to help these Jews outside of Spain's borders? What different levels within the Spanish state apparatus allowed for Spanish diplomats to save Jews outside of Spain's borders in spite of Franco's ambivalence? Why did numerous Spanish diplomats go out of their way to allow Jews to reach safety by passing through Spain? If this were the case of one diplomat, the story would be different. However, a series of diplomats with a fairly consistent policy—to help the Jews—cannot be ignored. The incredible resourcefulness demonstrated by these diplomats represents a clear pattern. What conditions led a string of varying diplomats to sympathize with the plight of the Jews and invoke the Sephardim's Spanish heritage to save them? And why did these diplomats receive such little recognition post World War Two, particularly by Israel and Yad

Vashem?<sup>15</sup>

My research in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Madrid and the Central Archives of the Administration in Alcala de Henares examined letters between Spanish diplomats and the Franco's regime to study their correspondence. This primary source archival research, in conjunction with secondary sources, forms the basis for my thesis.

### **Overview of Thesis**

The following chapters examine the cases of the three mentioned Spanish diplomats and explore reasons for the Spanish bureaucratic aid granted to the Sephardim during World War Two. In Chapter One, "The Ambiguous Legacy," I explore the Sephardic Diaspora and its legacies in Spain. Spain's expulsion of the Jews in 1492 provides a historical locus from which to consider several implications that emerge closer to World War Two. Spain's reevaluation of the Expulsion following a series of Spanish crises and Spain's bid for modernity and Enlightenment through Jewish Emancipation and the granting of citizenship to its Sephardim in 1924 helps to explain this phenomenon. In Chapter Two, "Like a Light Through Glass," I will

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<sup>15</sup> As the Jewish people's living memorial to the Holocaust, Yad Vashem safeguards the memory of the past and imparts meaning for future generations. Established in 1953, as the world center for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem is today a dynamic and vital place of intergenerational and international encounter. Quote from Yad Vashem website, [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org).

discuss Franco's complex and opportunistic relationship with the Sephardim, which will help to differentiate between the Franco regime and the humanitarian work of individual Spanish diplomats during World War Two. Additionally, I will delineate the historical conditions provided by the Spanish Civil War and World War Two in Spain. I will also delve into the Spanish immigration policy that allowed for the Sephardim to pass through Spain and onto safe destination as well as the history of the Spanish bureaucratic structure.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss Bernardo Rolland and his role as Consul General in Paris. The fact that Rolland operated at a close geographical proximity to Spain (France and Spain share a border) will be highlighted and juxtaposed with diplomats operating at a further distance from the Franco regime. I will also discuss Spanish border control as well as Rolland's role in issuing transit visas and protecting Sephardic property as an extension of Spanish property. Finally, writings and descriptions by American diplomats regarding diplomatic culture and responsibility will be used to help explain the actions taken by Spanish diplomats.

In Chapters Four and Five, the actions of Spanish diplomats Radigales in Greece and Palencia in Bulgaria will be discussed as well as the greater ease of pushing the bounds of Franco's authority at a greater geographical distance from Spain. The techniques used by Spanish diplomats to skirt the Spanish regime's authority as well as the nature of the

bureaucratic structure will be discussed to help explain the fact that these Spanish diplomats had the power to act in opposition to the Franco regime without facing major repercussions.

Finally, the Conclusion will focus on remembering the heroes of the Holocaust as well as the fact that recognition is often contingent on diplomatic relations. Specifically, the lack of Spanish-Israeli diplomatic relations following World War Two played a role in hindering the recognition of Spanish diplomats by Yad Vashem. I will touch on the issue of modern-day relations between the Sephardim and Spain, the issue of citizenship that has recently manifested itself again, and the significance of Spanish diplomatic aid during World War Two.

## Chapter 1: The Ambiguous Legacy

### Historical Background of Sephardim in Spain: The Expulsion of 1492 and the Diaspora

Spain has a complex relationship with the Sephardim, which greatly influenced the attitudes and politics of the Franco regime during the Second World War. The year 1492 marked a pivotal moment in history for a number of peoples, cultures, and places. 1492 is a fraught and notorious year in Spanish history: obviously associated with growth of the Spanish Empire and voyages of exploration, it is also the year in which the “Catholic Kings” (*Reyes Católicos* as they are called in Spain),<sup>16</sup> Isabelle and Ferdinand, issued an edict that the Jews from Spain and thus, with the stroke of a pen, destroyed the largest and most distinguished Jewish settlement in Europe.

In 1480 the Catholic Kings established the Inquisition, an organization centered around regulating the catholic faith and to ensure the orthodoxy of the Spanish *conversos*, or previous Spanish Jews who had converted to Catholicism.<sup>17</sup> The Inquisition was a direct result of two factors. The first was the massive conversions of Jews to Catholicism in the fifteenth century as a

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<sup>16</sup> The Catholic Kings is the joint title used to describe Queen Isabella I of Castile and King Ferdinand II of Aragon. The title of "Catholic King and Queen" was given to them by Pope Alexander VI in 1496 for supporting Catholic dogmas within their realms.

<sup>17</sup> Haim Beinart, *Los Judíos en España* (Madrid, España: Editorial MAPRE, 1992), 210.



means to avoid intolerance and acts of violence.<sup>18</sup> Many Jews renounced the religion of their forefathers, usually against their will, with the hopes that they would have a better life in Spain as part of the accepted, majority religion. Yet, although considered official Christians, many of these *conversos* never actually abandoned their ancestral faith and continued to practice their religion in secret, a practice called “crypto-Judaism,” at great personal risk. This practice was criminalized in Christianity due to its emphasis on orthodoxy, or the importance of purity of belief, rather than orthopraxy, the importance of ritual and tradition emphasized in Judaism.

The second factor that contributed to the Inquisition was a trip that Ferdinand and Isabel took to Seville in 1477. On this trip, they learned of the situation regarding crypto-Judaism in which many of the *conversos* “remained under the influence of their ex-correligionists, the Jews, despite their baptism.”<sup>19</sup> Many examples existed of apparent *conversos* who continued to pray in Hebrew and eat meat on days the church prohibited it. This discovery prompted the Catholic Kings to search for a way to resolve these acts of betrayal that the “infidels” made against their religion.

After a period of time with limited success, Ferdinand, Isabelle, and other church officials felt that the Inquisition was not a foolproof means of safeguarding the Catholic faith despite the

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<sup>18</sup> Perez, *Los Judíos en España*, 149.

<sup>19</sup> “Los conversos seguían estando bajo la influencia de sus ex-correligionarios judíos a pesar de su bautismo”: Beinart, *Los Judíos en España*, 197.

system of tribunal justice and punishment established by the Inquisition. As a result, on March 31, 1492 Ferdinand and Isabel signed the Edict of Expulsion, expelling the Jews and Muslims from Spain.<sup>20</sup> One factor that influenced the Expulsion was the ideology that the Catholic Kings were restoring Spain to the one true faith. Spain was not unique in this approach; part of the process of nation state building was premised upon the idea of having a religiously unified country. Spain took this idea one step further by issuing in the Edict of Expulsion. In doing this, Spain effectively rid itself of Jews until the modern day. Even by the twentieth century, very few Jews had returned to Spain, which is a factor that influenced Franco's policy to allow the Sephardim to return to Spain and pass through his country during World War Two. Additionally, the Expulsion resulted in a unique history of Spain vis-à-vis the Jews, for this early modern Expulsion arguably led to a sense of national guilt that influenced the country for centuries.

Aside from Jews, the Muslims represented another common enemy against which Spain had to protect itself in the late fifteenth century. In 711, the Muslim Moors from North Africa began their conquest of the Iberian Peninsula successfully crossing the Strait of Gibraltar and establishing their domain over Spain. Subsequently, Islamic rule over Spain lasted hundreds of years and was especially pronounced in Andalucía, the south of Spain. The Muslims greatly impacted Spanish society and culture: Arabic had a strong lexical influence on the Spanish

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<sup>20</sup> Beinart, *Los Judíos en España*, 223.

language and few thousand Spanish words have their roots in Arabic. The profound influence of the Muslims on Spain contributed to a sense of paranoia and the desire officially to rid Spain of dangerous infidels: the Jews and the Muslims.

Another factor that influenced the Expulsion was the ideology that by expelling the Jews, the Catholic monarchs were showing their pride in their Catholic titles, and religious zeal in a messianic environment. Ferdinand was not alone in his fifteenth century monarchy-building endeavor. Religious conformity was part of the monarchy building process, and the glory of any Christians King was to have a religiously unified country. Additionally, it is possible that the Isabella and Ferdinand were trying with the Catholic king of France to be the “most Catholic.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, political factors played a role in this decision along with religious ones. Furthermore, the Catholic kings hoped to inspire a national religious unity within a totally Christian nation to reinforce a cohesive national identity.<sup>22</sup>

Although there are no exact numbers, it is believed that more than 100,000 Sephardic Jews were forced from their homeland.<sup>23</sup> The movement of Sephardim outside of Spain to other parts of the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, or the Sephardic Diaspora,<sup>24</sup> brought

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<sup>21</sup> J. H. Elliot, *España y Su Mundo, 1500-1700* (Madrid, España: Yale University, 1989), 207.

<sup>22</sup> Perez, *Los Judíos en España*, 208.

<sup>23</sup> Nieto, *El Último Sefardí*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Diaspora* has its roots in Greek, meaning "scattering" or "dispersion." The Jewish people have suffered several Diasporas in addition to their Expulsion from Spain such as the Babylonian Exile and the destruction of the Second

these Jews to three principal zones – Portugal and North Africa, northern Europe, and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>25</sup> Some Sephardim traveled by land, going to countries such as Portugal and France. Others traveled by sea, arriving in places such as the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and England.<sup>26</sup> Some went to Muslim territories such as Morocco and the Ottoman Empire (see figure 3).<sup>27</sup> The Sephardic expulsion deeply impacted Spanish collective memory for years to come and can account for the context in which both Franco's government and the rogue diplomats acted during World War Two.<sup>28</sup>

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Temple. The Second Temple was an important Jewish Holy Temple that stood on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem between 516 BCE and 70 CE. It replaced the First Temple, which was destroyed in 586 BCE, when the Jewish nation was exiled to Babylon.

<sup>25</sup> María Antonia Bravo, *Diaspora Sefardí* (Madrid, España: Editorial MAPFRE, 1992), 33.

<sup>26</sup> Yosef Kaplan, *Judíos nuevos en AMSTERDAM- Estudio sobre la historia social e intelectual del judaísmo sefardí en el siglo XVII* (Barcelona, Spain: Gedisma Editorial, 1996), 27.

<sup>27</sup> Perez, *Los Judíos en España*, 269.

<sup>28</sup> Bravo, *Diáspora Sefardí*, 33.



Figure 3: Map showing Sephardic Diaspora. *Source:* [www.worldreligions.psu.edu](http://www.worldreligions.psu.edu)

Ultimately, the exile of the Sephardim was a traumatic and difficult experience, often resulting in an identity crisis and a redefinition of the Jewish identity.<sup>29</sup> Among Jewish individuals who converted to Christianity, an enormous amount of confusion ensued and often times a hybrid theology developed in which individuals thought of themselves as both Jews and Christians. For those Jews who remained faithful to Judaism, the Diaspora took them to foreign lands where they had to renegotiate the very idea of what it meant to be Jewish. At the same time, however, many Sephardim continued to remain proud of their Spanish roots and maintained the Spanish language and literature with enthusiasm. These Spanish Jews were

<sup>29</sup> Kaplan, *Judios nuevos en AMSTERDAM*, 27.

saddened by their expulsion from their Fatherland as is demonstrated in a poem by a Spanish Rabbi, Abraham Capón residing in the Ottoman Empire (modern day Turkey).<sup>30</sup> In this poem, Capón invokes strong feelings of emotion from the ties he has with his homeland. He refers to Spain as his *querida* and *país glorioso*, his “dear and glorious country,” and refers to the Spanish language as a *dulce lenguaje*, “sweet language,” that he will never forget. He vows to never stop loving his fatherland and describes the expulsion as *atormetado* or “tormented.” More than anything else, this poem demonstrates the involuntary and painful nature of the Expulsion as well as the Sephardic classification of identity as equally Spanish and Jewish.

Following this painful Expulsion, the Sephardim dispersed throughout the world in what is known as the Sephardic Diaspora. Through their dispersal, the Sephardim actually extended their reach as a transnational ethnic and religious community. These ties helped the Sephardim develop an international business community. Clear examples of this solidarity are the Sephardic communities of Amsterdam and the Ottoman Empire, places where some Sephardim achieved great financial success.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> A ti España bien querida, nosotros madre te llamamos, y mientras dure nuestra vida, tu dulce lengua no dejamos aunque tú nos desterraste, como madrastra de tu seno, no dejamos de amarte, como santísimo terreno, en que dejaron nuestros padres, a sus parientes enterrados, y a las semillas de millares, de atormentados y quemados, por ti conservamos, amor filial, país glorioso, por consiguiente te mandamos, nuestro saludo caluroso: Nieto, *El Último Sefardí*, 23-24.

<sup>31</sup> Perez, *Los Judíos en España*, 260.

Within Spain, the expulsion of the Sephardim represented a *reconquest*, as in reconquering of Spain by the Catholics from the “infidels.” While the associations of the Sephardic diaspora were initially positive, it later began to mark Spain in unwelcome ways in an international context.

### **Jewish Emancipation**

Spain’s backwardness beginning in the seventeenth century, as indicated by the Expulsion of the Sephardic Jews, was further compounded by the lack of Jewish Emancipation in Spain in the eighteenth century. While the modern day Jewish community regards its two central historical traumas as the destruction of the second temple and the Holocaust, the greatest tragedy to befall Jews within a singular country was the Expulsion from Spain in 1492. During the era of the Expulsion, Spain was at the foreground in the development of anti-Jewish attitudes and held a “semi-racial” conception of the Jews. The very idea of “purity of the blood” or *limpieza de sangre*,<sup>32</sup> along with the belief that Jewish converts to Catholicism were not real Spaniards and that their conversion was not genuine, illustrates this racial ideology. This racial conception of Jews stemmed from the fear of *conversos* Judaizing, or imposing secretly held

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<sup>32</sup> “Purity of the Blood”- Referred to those who were considered pure “Old Christians,” without Muslim or Jewish ancestors. This discredited *conversos*, or Spanish Jews who converted to Christianity, and kept them from being considered true Christians on a racial basis.

Jewish beliefs, on the greater Christian population through their infiltration of the Church. The Spanish Inquisition took as one of its main purposes the eradication of Judaizing influences in Spain.

As the Inquisition continued within Spain into nineteenth century, Jewish Emancipation took place throughout the rest of Europe. As early as 1782, Austrian emperor Joseph II issued the Edict of Toleration to “make the Jewish nation useful and serviceable to the State mainly through better education and enlightenment of its youth...”<sup>33</sup> In 1789, the French Revolution wrought changes in society that paved the way for Jewish emancipation and citizenship. In fact, Napoleon Bonaparte emancipated the Jews in every location French armies successfully conquered.<sup>34</sup> In England, while no formal emancipation occurred, the Jews attained equal rights by the 1830s.<sup>35</sup> Emancipation came later to Germany, which in 1871 finally emancipated its Jews with the underlying condition that they would assimilate into society at large.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in 1869 the Ottoman Empire officially emancipated its Jewish population. Thus, “by 1871 most of central, southern, and Western European; Ottoman; and Anglo Jewries had been legally emancipated.”<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, the Spanish Inquisition lasted into the 19<sup>th</sup> century; while French Jews gained

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<sup>33</sup> Efron, *The Jews, A History*, 243.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.



citizenship as early as 1791, the few Jews remaining in Spain continued to be burned at the stake.<sup>38</sup> The generalized emancipation of European Jewry and the fact that emancipation was seen as indicative of modernity resulted in Spain's portrayal as backwards and traditional.

Spanish nationalization proceeded through an attempt to reincorporate Jews into their history and to use them as cultural emissaries. Part of Spain's process of nationalization and modernization was the revisiting of their past. During the twentieth century Spain's conception of modernity became contingent upon the extension of rights of citizenship to those who they previously expelled in order to be held in high regard among members of "advanced," "progressive" European nations. Thus, in 1924 Spain attempted to reverse the Expulsion by granting citizenship to its Sephardic Diasporic community by issuing the Primo de Rivera law.

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<sup>38</sup> Radical revolutionary politics benefitted French Jews greatly and as the French Revolution of 1789 transitioned into Napoleon's Empire, Napoleon's ascendancy to power resulted in the emancipation and granting of citizenship of many of Europe's Jews (not in Spain, however). *Ibid.*, 244.

## Chapter 2: “Like a Light Through Glass”

### Spanish Relations with Sephardim in the Twentieth Century

The Primo de Rivera Law is just one example of Spain trying to reverse the Expulsion and present itself in a positive and enlightened light to the rest of Western Europe. Clearly, the theme of expulsion and national myth associated with the *reconquest* of Spain carried forward into modern day. During this time, it began to be considered a harmful mistake, which resulted in the decline of Spain’s Golden Age. The idea that the Expulsion of the Jews in 1492 represented a historical blunder was first articulated and then popularized following the disastrous year of 1898, when Spain lost the final remnants of its historical empire: Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.<sup>39</sup> The state’s post-imperial identity crisis and economic recession forced Spaniards to look towards the past and reevaluate their previous actions. Looking for answers, some

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<sup>39</sup> The Spanish–American War was a conflict in 1898 between Spain and the United States that was caused by American intervention in the ongoing Cuban War of Independence. American attacks on Spain's Pacific possessions then caused the Philippine–American War. The end result was the 1898 Treaty of Paris, which favored the United States; it allowed temporary American control of Cuba and gave the United States colonial authority over Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippine islands, all of which were previously controlled by Spain. The defeat and collapse of the Spanish Empire was a blow to Spanish national pride, and led to a philosophical and artistic reevaluation of Spanish society known as the Generation of '98. See Isabelle Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews, 1898-1945: anti-Semitism and Opportunism* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), 10.

critical Spaniards became convinced that the Expulsion of the Jews in 1492 had resulted in a series of crises for Spain.

Scholar Eduardo Martín de Pozuelo described this “bad conscience,” saying “in Spain there didn’t exist this angry hatred of the Jew; on the contrary, probably the bad conscience generated in the Spanish subconscious for the Expulsion of the Sephardim in 1492 inspired philo-semitic legal norms” in the early twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> Thus, part of the Franco regime’s mentality towards the Jews was influenced by the idea of the Expulsion and compensating for this historical blunder.

The strong waves of anti-Semitism that hit Central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century actually paralleled an opposite era within Spain: a campaign of philo-sephardism or “love of Sephardic Jews.” This term, which differs from philo-semitism or “love of Jews” generally speaking, is not necessarily synonymous with positive relations. A state can have periods of relatively smooth relations with Jews and still be anti-Semitic. In this case, Spain entered into a period of appreciation for the cultural ties Sephardic Jews shared with Spaniards at large.

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<sup>40</sup> “En España no existía este rabioso odio a lo judío; al contrario, probamente la mala conciencia generada en el subconsciente español por la expulsión de los sefarditas en 1492 inspiró normas legales pro semitas” (pg. 20).

Several events triggered a renewed interest in the Sephardim or this campaign of philo-Sephardism. For instance, in 1920 the *Casa de Sephardim*<sup>41</sup> was founded in Madrid by Angel Pulido.<sup>42</sup> Pulido was particularly impressed by Sephardic Jews and started a positive campaign lauding their cultural and economic benefits. He specifically highlighted their potential to help Spanish business interests in the parts of the Mediterranean.<sup>43</sup> In this respect, the Sephardim were elevated to the highest position amongst all other Jews, “a true aristocracy among Jews” due to the “supremacy” of Spanish culture and a belief that the Sephardim would help save Spain from economic ruin slowly took hold.<sup>44</sup> While this image of the Spanish Jew was clearly a major improvement from the notion of “enemy” of the Expulsion era, it is important to note that the philo-sephardic trend did not free the Jews from anti-Semitic stereotypes but “actually usually amplified them” as well as emphasized the idea of Sephardic racial purity.<sup>45</sup> Clearly, then, Spain held many contradictory notions about Jews and still maintained many classical anti-Semitic stereotypes, as well as some “semi-racial” conceptions of Jews.

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<sup>41</sup> “House of the Sephardim”

<sup>42</sup> Pulido was a prominent doctor and politician in Spain. He encountered Sephardic Jews on a trip to Danube in 1903 and was extremely impressed by this Spanish community. As a result of this trip, he started a cultural and economic campaign in favor of the Sephardim: Bernd Rother *Franco y el Holocausto* (Madrid, Spain: Marcial Pons Historia, 2005), 34.

<sup>43</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 41 and Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews*, 27.

<sup>45</sup> Rother, *Ibid.*

Despite these contradictory notions, Spain's trend towards philo-sephardism is clearly mirrored in its legislation. On December 1, 1869, General Francisco Serrano officially revoked the 15<sup>th</sup> century Edict of Expulsion based on newly espoused revolutionary principles.<sup>46</sup> This action took place a year after the Glorious Revolution in Spain (1868), in which Queen Isabella II was removed from the throne. This revocation of the Edict of Expulsion naturally held a strong ideological significance but far more important was the Primo de Rivera law of December 20, 1924, a royal decree which granted full citizenship to "individuals of Spanish origin who had enjoyed the protection of Spain's diplomatic agents as if they were Spanish citizens and were under the false impression that they already were Spanish citizens."<sup>47</sup> This law expanded Spain's influence on the Sephardic Jews by granting Spanish citizenship and protection to them.

Spain's granting of citizenship to the Sephardim was effectively the opposite direction from that most other European nations were taking at the time. The motives of this action were two-fold. The first was to obtain redemption for the Expulsion amongst both the Jews and the rest of the "civilized" world. Spain could be considered "modern" only by participating in post-

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<sup>46</sup> The revolution was committed to basic human rights, such as the commitment to religious freedom. In 1869, the article of the new declaration regarding freedom of religion was adopted by majority vote. Specifically, article 21 maintained the importance of Catholicism within Spain but also assured freedom of worship for foreigners and Spaniards alike. The passage of this law revealed the liberal trend that was politically accepted in nineteenth century Spain: Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews*, 27.

Enlightenment Jewish emancipation or the extension of civil rights throughout Western Europe.

Second, this action was a means through which Spain could spread its influence, creating something akin to imperialism of a trans-national Jewish diaspora that could claim Spanish citizenship. Similar to the way Italy had illusions of imperial grandeur, Spain too hoped to gain glory by recognizing the Sephardim as Spanish and compete in the European imperial framework.

Despite this “enlightened” action, the reactionary trends in Spain became more salient with the advent of Franco’s Second Republic following the Spanish Civil War. Francisco Franco, the Spanish general, dictator and leader of the Nationalist military rebellion during the Spanish Civil War later became the authoritarian head of Spain from 1936 until he died in 1975. Franco’s authoritarian regime was premised on a new nationalistic and traditional Spain, a Spain associated with the anti-Semitism of past times. The Franco regime’s stress on nationalism and tradition evoked the anti-Semitism of the past. Additionally, the importance Franco placed on Spain’s roots in Catholicism, a church steeped in anti-Semitic tradition, also promised a resurgence of anti-Semitism. Yet, racial anti-Semitism did not take hold in Spain in the twentieth century the way it did in the rest of Europe. The Germans were quick to take note of this; according to German ambassador in Madrid Eberhard von Stohrer “the Spaniards do not

understand the concept of race the way national-socialism defines it.”<sup>48</sup> While anti-Semitism absolutely existed within Spain and while certain elements of racialism existed in their elevation of Sephardic Jews over Ashkenazi Jews, Spaniards never expressed the same hatred of Jews as much of the rest of Europe did.

As a result, most of the western progressive intelligentsia considered Spain to be an outcast as a fascist country. Spain’s fascist regime, along with Italy’s, were social pariahs to the western world fighting for “freedom” and “democracy,” but ironically the safest locations for the Jews in all of Europe were actually within these very countries. In Spain “there were no gas chambers or persecution and killings imbued with sadism for the type of anti-Semitism installed in the regime was, more or less, no more than returning some refugees that had crossed their border clandestinely.”<sup>49</sup> In Spain, a country that appeared to have so little promise based on a long and traumatic history, the Jews of 1940s Europe found an unexpected haven. This analytic framework presents the problem of officials from fascist countries acting in philo-semitic ways:

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<sup>48</sup> “Los españoles no comprenden el concept de raza que define el nacionalsocialismo”: Eduardo Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo, cómplice del Holocausto y otros episodios desconocidos de la dictadura* (Barcelona, Spain: Libros de Vanguardia, 2012), 46.

<sup>49</sup> “En España no había cámaras de gas ni persecución asesina de semejante sadismo; el antisemitismo mas o menos instalado en el régimen no fue mucho mas allá de devolver a algunos evadidos que habían cruzado la frontera clandestinamente”: Diego Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes: Los Españoles que plantaron cara al Holocausto* (Espasa: Barcelona, España, 201), 18.

these were the “bad” countries from most historiographic viewpoints of World War Two—yet the diplomats from these countries acted in exemplary ways.

### **Spain at the Beginning of World War Two and the Significance of Spanish Nationality**

The importance of the 1924 Primo de Rivera in the context of World War Two is crucial to underscore. This law served as the conceptual underpinning for the diplomatic aid and the granting of visas provided to the Sephardim overseas during World War Two when these diplomats eventually used this law differently than was originally intended.<sup>50</sup> Spanish diplomats used vague language such as “individuals of Spanish origin” rather than a direct reference to “Jews” or “Sephardim” to reinterpret this law and use it in a way that best suited their political and legal agenda: saving the Jews.

Many prominent figures of Spain’s Second Republic<sup>51</sup> supported Jewish interests and these sympathies were illustrated with agreements signed by Spain, Egypt, and Greece in which Jewish families were protected by Spain.<sup>52</sup> Between this positive treatment and the steady growth

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<sup>50</sup> Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Spain’s Second Republic was the government of Spain from 14, 1931 until General Francisco Franco staged a military rebellion. It was formed when King Alfonso XIII left the country after Republican candidates won a majority in municipal elections. The government of the Second Republic was exiled on April 1, 1939, when the loyalist Republican forces surrendered at the end of the Spanish Civil War to rebel forces (*nacionales*) led by Franco.

<sup>52</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 38.



in the Jewish population of Spain until 1936, Spanish-Jewish relations remained on very good terms. In fact, Francisco Franco's press officer made a statement explicitly denying an anti-Semitic basis to the Spanish nationalist movement saying, "an anti-Jewish policy in Spain presumes the existence of a Jewish problem, which does not exist in this country."<sup>53</sup> This statement was released, however, only after the Western press expressed concern over anti-Semitic tirades by General Gonzalo Queipo de Llano, a notorious anti-Semite and important member of the rebel leadership.<sup>54</sup> Despite Franco's anti-Semitic murmurings at times, his regime never instituted any specific anti-Semitic or racially conceived policies and many facets of his regime, such as Spanish diplomats, showed great benevolence to the Sephardim.

### **The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the *Guernica***

The Spanish Civil War set the stage for the Sephardim to receive diplomatic aid during World War Two. The Spanish Civil War, which took place from 1936-1939, began when a group of generals under Jose Sanjurjo<sup>55</sup> declared themselves in opposition to the elected government of the Second Spanish Republic. The rebel coup was only partially successful, and Spain was left

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<sup>53</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 49-50.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>55</sup> General in the Spanish army who was an important conspirator in the military uprising that resulted in the Spanish Civil War.

both politically and military divided. Franco himself became important when he began a war of attrition against the established government in an effort to gain control of Spain. During the Civil War, Hitler came to Franco and the Nationalists' aid, seeing a potential ally in a regime an ideologically fascist stance similar to Germany's.<sup>56</sup> This aid came in the form of military assistance, creating strong bonds between Spain and members of the Axis powers. The Germans later used this assistance as ammunition behind their request for Spanish support during World War Two.

Certain aspects of the Spanish Civil War were tinged with anti-Semitism. Franco expressed confusing and inconsistent sentiments about the Jews throughout the course of his regime. During the Civil War, numerous right-wing groups spread Judeo-Masonic Bolshevik conspiracy theories<sup>57</sup> to foster the unification of various groups against a common enemy – the Jews.<sup>58</sup> Franco himself made several anti-Semitic slurs prior to the Spanish Civil War, and his propaganda frequently attacked the Jews, linking them with Masonry and communism. In fact, in a 1939 Christmas message Franco noted,

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<sup>56</sup> Stanely G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge, GB: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 136.

<sup>57</sup> The name given to the claim that Jews have been the driving force behind Communist movements, or sometimes more specifically Soviet Bolshevism. Judeo-Bolshevism is a catchword for the idea that Communism is a Jewish conspiracy, and it has often coincided with nationalistic tendencies in the 20th century and 21st century. Especially in Fascist nations who demonize Communism, this was a particularly dangerous mentality and way to create a scapegoat.

<sup>58</sup> Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews*, 138.

[N]ow that you all comprehend the motives of distinct nations for fighting and staying away from the activities of that race [the Jews] in which greediness is a stigma that characterizes them, their dominance in society causes an annoyance and danger. We, by the grace of God and the clear vision of the Catholic Kings, have had centuries free of this heavy burden, and we cannot remain indifferent before the new formation of the greedy and egotistical spirit.<sup>59</sup>

It is important to note that this speech was given a few months following the outbreak of World War Two and the Germans were likely putting intense pressure on Franco to support the Axis Powers. Additionally, this quote may very well be the source of the exceptionalizing of Sephardic Jews: the notion that Jews in general may be bad, but a small minority is sometimes helpful. This is especially the case if this minority comprises Jews of Spanish heritage. Sephardic Jews are better than Ashkenazi Jews because at least they are *Spanish*—so went the reasoning. This idea does not correlate to not being anti-Semitic, but rather to complex, multi-tiered notions of ethnicity that can be used opportunistically when convenient.

The inhumane actions of Franco's Nationalist forces against Republicans and their sympathizers in the Civil War were symbolized for the rest of Europe, and later the world, in Picasso's painting *Guernica*, commissioned by the Spanish Republican government in 1937 (see figure 4). The bombing of a Basque village by German and Italian warplanes, carried out at the

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<sup>59</sup> “Ahora comprenderéis los motivos de las distintas naciones para combatir y alejar de sus actividades aquella razas en las que la codicia es el estigma que las caracteriza, pues su predominio en la sociedad es causa de perturbación y peligros. Nosotros, que por la gracia de dios y la clara visión de los reyes católicos, hace siglos que nos libramos de esta pesada carga, no podemos permanecer indiferentes ante la nueva formación de espíritus codicias y egoístas”: Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 26.

behest of Franco's nationalist forces, is memorialized in this haunting image: beyond the specific subject matter, the *Guernica* came to represent the tragedy of war: its destruction, its senseless killings of the innocent. Furthermore, this image, which circulated in Western Europe and the United States through copies and photographs, was joined by other media descriptions of the brutality of Franco's forces. After a bloody three years, the Civil War ended in 1939 with a loss of the Republicans to Franco's Nationalists. The end of the Civil War resulted in a long-term Fascist dictatorship headed by Franco, now known internationally for ruthlessness.



Figure 4: *Guernica* (1937). *Source:* [www.pablopicasso.org](http://www.pablopicasso.org)

The Spanish Civil War thus presented the next perfect opportunity for Spain to use the Sephardim for its own self-fashioning purposes. Franco's government, in a sort of public relations campaign, later claimed an "enlightened" and liberal treatment of the Sephardim during

World War Two, painting Franco to the rest of Western Europe as a savior of the Jews. Most likely, Franco authorized this representation to help downplay the atrocities of his regime and to contrast his own brutal fascist reign to Hitler's.

Yet in reality, Jewish communities within the Spanish republic actually did welcome Spain's new Nationalist-headed regime due to its philo-sephardic leaning.<sup>60</sup> For instance, the new government made "several goodwill gestures" towards the Jews in its new constitution.<sup>61</sup> This constitution granted Jews equal rights, declared that Spain had no official religion, and proclaimed freedom of worship, which are all hallmarks of modernity. Part of the reason for these gestures can be attributed to the fact that during the Civil War, some wealthy Jews in the Spanish protectorate of Morocco<sup>62</sup> contributed to the Nationalist cause and personally funded part of the war effort.<sup>63</sup> These wartime contributions put these Jews in good standing with the new government once the Nationalists won the war.

This new regime, which blamed the Jews for many abstract problems, ironically also created a center dedicated to the study of the culture and history of the Jews.<sup>64</sup> In all these

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<sup>60</sup> Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews*, 40.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>62</sup> The Spanish protectorate over Morocco was established as part of Spain's imperial project in 1912 under the Treat of Fez.

<sup>63</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 26.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 28.

instances we see the ways in which Spain's treatment of Sephardic Jews was construed as displaying, both to Spain and to other European states, Spain's enlightenment and national culture in contrast to its reputation as a reactionary nation.

### **World War Two, 1939-1945**

Spain's relationship with Germany additionally influenced the Spanish regime's attitude towards the Jews. As World War Two approached, Germany increasingly began to expect Spanish aid due to their support for Spanish National forces during the Spanish Civil War. However, the Civil War made Spain reluctant to take part in another war. With its economy already ravaged and the country in a state of disarray, Spain preferred to remain neutral, which greatly benefited the Sephardim.<sup>65</sup> Eventually, Spain did in fact change its wartime status from that of neutral to non-belligerent on the side of the Axis powers and even deepened its involvement with Germany by sending its own "Blue Division" to the Russian front (see figure 5).<sup>66</sup> Part of the reason for this support was that for a short period of time Spain entertained the delusion that the Axis powers would help Spain in its quest to re-establish a Hispanic empire.

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<sup>65</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 56.

<sup>66</sup> David Wingate Pike, *Franco and the Axis Stigma* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 100.

This “Gibraltar fixation” involved the idea that Spain would exercise authority once again over Gibraltar and regions of the French empire in northern and West Africa.<sup>67</sup>



Figure 5: Hitler and Franco meet on the French side of the border on October 23, 1940.

Source: [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

Yet Spain’s position in the war constantly shifted to reflect an opportunistic attempt to gain support of the winning side. The extension of allied influence was strong and Franco began distancing himself from the Axis powers as early as October 1, 1942, when he explicitly defined

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<sup>67</sup> Raanan Rein, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust and the Inquisition: Israel’s Relations with Francoist Spain* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997), 23.

Spain's position as neutral rather than nonbelligerent.<sup>68</sup> In this light, many view Franco's later benevolent gestures towards the Allies as an effort to join the winning side at the last minute and prevent any efforts to overthrow his authoritarian regime.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, some view Spain's positive treatment of the Jews as a concession made to the Allies to compensate for its previous collaboration with the Third Reich. Overall, Franco's inconsistent and ambivalent actions have continued to perplex historians to this day, making his true motives impossible to discern.<sup>70</sup>

By helping the Jews, Franco's regime was able to gain some good publicity without actually having to do all that much or even allowing the Jews to stay. In this way, Franco could get good press and enrich Spain's economy via Jews in transit without even allowing them to settle permanently in Spain. This arrangement resulted from a number of factors. For one, Spain's location in Europe allowed it to play a crucial role in rescuing European Jews. For one, Spain shared a border with German occupied Europe. The Pyrenees separated "free" Spain from Vichy France, making the passage over this mountain range the virtual equivalent to the freedom passage through the Swiss Alps.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 62.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>70</sup> Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 5.

<sup>71</sup> Calvet, *Las montañas de la libertad*, 92.



Another important feature was Spain's access to the sea through its ports and border with neutral Portugal, which provided means for refugees to flee the continent of Europe in search of a better life in the United States or South America.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, Spain's collaborative relations with Germany placed Spanish diplomats in the best position to help the Jews. This collaboration allowed Spain to exercise its leverage to request concessions from Hitler. These close relations fostered circumstances in which "during the most critical stage of the Holocaust Spain's capacity to rescue Jews was at its greatest."<sup>73</sup> Thus the "ideological and political proximity" of Spain to Germany placed the Spanish in an ideal position from which to help the Jews.<sup>74</sup> The Jews who passed through Spain, both Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, were issued visas requiring them to be "in transit," meaning that Spain could not be their final destination. Repatriation itself was certainly a tenuous issue and according to Chaim Lipchitz, energetic consular protection was afforded "as long as Spain was not asked to repatriate her citizens."<sup>75</sup>

Spanish officials allowed the Sephardim and "unpatriated citizens" to remain in Spain for only thirty days and then continue moving on to a different final destination, "going through the country like a light goes through glass, without a trace," as foreign minister General Gomez

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<sup>72</sup> Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II*, 217.

<sup>73</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 67.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>75</sup> Lipchitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*. 45.

Jordana<sup>76</sup> described it.<sup>77</sup> This “light through glass” policy implied that the Spanish government did not want Jews to remain in or maybe even influence Spain, including the Sephardim. Despite these sentiments, Franco was quick to spin Spain’s role for the media and engaged in propagandistic efforts to exploit Spanish diplomatic aid as examples of his regime’s personal efforts to help the Jews for humanitarian purposes only.

Indicative of this changed stance, diatribes against the Jews disappeared from Franco’s lexicon following 1943 with the turning tide of World War Two when Franco hoped to gain the support of the Allied powers.<sup>78</sup> This is obviously an ironic projection of an ambivalent attitude towards the Jews, which clearly characterizes Franco himself, and how Jews were mere chess pieces to be used and manipulated in Franco’s larger game. Additionally, some Spaniards argue that information regarding the anti-Semitic persecution of Jews under the Franco regime was systematically destroyed and hidden towards the end of the war to sanitize Franco’s image to the western world.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Spanish foreign minister who allowed for increasingly good relations with Allies. He replaced Serrano Sumner in 1942, Spain’s previous foreign minister who was blatantly pro-Axis.

<sup>77</sup> Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews*, 147.

<sup>78</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 215.

<sup>79</sup> Jorge Martínez Reverte, “La lista de Franco para el Holocausto” (Madrid: El País), 20-06-2010.

New evidence suggests that Franco actually compiled a list of Jews in Spain for the Nazis as requested by Heinrich Himmler.<sup>80</sup> According to a 2010 *El País* newspaper article “General Franco gave list of Spanish Jews to the Nazis,” in 1941 Franco ordered his officials to make a list of 6,000 Jews living in Spain to be handed over to the Nazis as part of their Final Solution.<sup>81</sup> According to the article, provincial governors were warned to pay special attention to Sephardic Jews because “their Ladino language and Hispanic background helped them fit into Spanish society.”<sup>82</sup> Additionally, the order, which was sent out in May of 1941, specified “their [the Sephardim] adaptation to our environment and their similar temperament allow them to hide their origins more easily” and therefore lent the Sephardim easier means of subverting Spanish society.<sup>83</sup> This information was discovered in a secret Jewish archive, most of which was destroyed by the Spanish government following the defeat of the Nazis in 1945.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, following World War Two Spain became a haven once again – this time to Nazi collaborators and criminals.<sup>85</sup> After the war, the Franco regime was hospitable to a host of

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<sup>80</sup> Giles Tremlett, “General Franco gave list of Spanish Jews to the Nazis” (Madrid: El País), 20 June 2010.

<sup>81</sup> The Final Solution was Nazi Germany's plan and execution of the systematic genocide of European Jews during World War II. The goal of this plan was to annihilate the Jewish people. Heinrich Himmler was the main architect of this plan: Tremlett, “General Franco gave list of Spanish Jews to the Nazis”

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews*, 155.

infamous Nazis such as Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, Leon Degrelle, Reinhard Zpitzy and Hans Lazar.<sup>86</sup> These individuals either chose to remain in Spain for some time or ironically used Spain as an escape route to Latin American countries (largely Argentina) just as many Jews had done during World War Two.<sup>87</sup>

### **Spanish Bureaucratic Structure**

The formation and history of the Spanish diplomatic corps accounts for the aid provided to the Sephardim by some Spanish diplomats. According to scholar and Spanish diplomat (since 1954) José Luis Ruiz Pérez, “Spanish history has moments in which diplomacy found itself facing a dilemma” where individuals forgot their loyalties to the Spanish state and Spanish diplomats worked against their own government.<sup>88</sup> The Spanish diplomatic career was “configured as a special body of public function for the representation and international relations of the state.”<sup>89</sup> The process of negotiation as well as the representative character of diplomatic

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>88</sup> La historia de España brinda algunos momentos en que la diplomacia se hallaron ante un dilema”: José Ruiz Pérez, *Las depuraciones de la carrera diplomática española, 1931-1980* (Editorial Dossoles: Burgos, Spain, 2005), 10.

<sup>89</sup> “La carrera diplomática en España se configure como un cuerpo especial le la función publica destinado a la representación y relación internacional del estado”: Rocio Valdivielso Del Real, *La carrera diplomática en España (1939-1990)* (Madrid: Ministerio), 5.

activity plays an important role in this career. The Congress of Vienna in 1815<sup>90</sup> established the fundamentals of diplomacy following the reorganization of Europe after the fall of the Napoleonic Empire.<sup>91</sup> From this point until the First World War, diplomacy was considered an “art” or “science.”<sup>92</sup>

Specifically in Spain, the *real decreto* of 1844 organized the diplomatic career hierarchically into distinct categories so that the “diplomatic career would be comprised of extraordinary ambassadors.”<sup>93</sup> The main goal of the decree was to create a system of gradual ascension in the hierarchical structure.<sup>94</sup> However, the true start to the modern bureaucratic organization did not begin until much later. In 1883, as a consequence of a new state ministry under Marques de la Vega de Armijo, a less egalitarian system was put into place.<sup>95</sup> As a result,

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<sup>90</sup> The Congress of Vienna was a conference whose goal was to deal with issues in Europe stemming from the French Revolutionary Wars, the Napoleonic Wars, and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. The result of the Congress was the redrawing of Europe’s political map and establishing the bounds of France’s power. This Congress was the first of a series of meetings amongst European countries, which later came to be known as the “Concert of Europe.” This effort to create a balance of power in Europe is viewed as the forerunner to later peace organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations.

<sup>91</sup> Valdivielso, *La Carrera Diplomática en España*, 11.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>93</sup> “El real decreto de 1844 organizo la carrera diplomática jerárquicamente el distintas categorías, disponiendo en su artículo primero que “la carrera diplomática se compondrá de embajadores ordinarios o extraordinarios...”: Valdivielso, *La Carrera Diplomática en España (1939-1990)*, 23.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 25.

the great majority of members active in the Spanish diplomatic corps into World War Two remained members of the bourgeoisie and representatives of the aristocratic class.<sup>96</sup>

The Spanish diplomatic corps was again influenced by state affairs in 1936 with the advent of the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish diplomatic corps was one of the bodies of the state administration that the Spanish Civil War most impacted by the drastic change in politics produced in Spain during this era.<sup>97</sup> With the independence produced by the fall of the monarchy, the majority of Spanish diplomats actively continued serving the new regime. While many accepted the new republican government and saw its establishment as the road to a modernized Spain, others did not support Franco's regime and the way in which it came to power.<sup>98</sup>

The Spanish ranking system established its place in the new regime by the end of the Civil War. The diplomatic corps, however, did not achieve the full confidence of the new regime due to its characteristics and formation.<sup>99</sup> Diaries from foreign minister General Gomez Jordana that were recently published by his son contain phrases such as, "I took advantage of another occasion to demonstrate the small effect the diplomatic body has."<sup>100</sup> The first attempt at

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<sup>96</sup>Pérez, *Las depuraciones de la carrera diplomática española*, 37.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>100</sup>"aprovechó una vez mas la ocasión para demostrar su poco afecto al cuerpo diplomático": Ibid., 171.

restructuring the ranking of diplomats occurred on July 18, 1936 when Franco came to power.<sup>101</sup>

It was not until November 7, 1942 however, that Franco's government established an official diplomatic school.<sup>102</sup>

Until 1942, the diplomatic institution did not appear to have an exclusive mission or specific professional socialization of the new members to the career.<sup>103</sup> According to scholar José Luis Ruiz Pérez, the majority of members in the Spanish diplomatic corps in 1936 were conservative but not necessarily opposed to the republican regime.<sup>104</sup> With the creation of the diplomatic school, there was a qualitative jump in the role of the state and its responsibility in the process of selection and personal formation of the diplomatic corps.<sup>105</sup> Additionally, the diplomatic school introduced a change in the system of selection of new diplomats; this selection was aimed at developing conditions to unify the diplomatic corps before their entrance into the Spanish rank.<sup>106</sup> Through a process of purification and reform, the Spanish government hoped to unite the motivations of the political character of the diplomatic corps.<sup>107</sup> To do this, the process sought to eliminate those aspiring diplomats who despite demonstrating sufficient technical

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>102</sup> Valdivielso, *La Carrera Diplomática en España*, 27.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>104</sup> Pérez, *Las depuraciones de la carrera diplomática española*, 69.

<sup>105</sup> Valdivielso, *La Carrera Diplomática en España*, 33.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>107</sup> Pérez, *Las depuraciones de la carrera diplomática española*, 27.

knowledge did not possess other important qualities, such as loyalty. Those interested in becoming a diplomat had to demonstrate “good conduct and impeccable moral and social records” with a focus on ideological and political ideology.<sup>108</sup> The purpose of a bureaucracy, according to the Spanish diplomatic core, was to act as an extension of the state administration. As a consequence, the personal politics by individual bureaucrats should match the central government’s politics, because the individual politics of a diplomat impact their actions in their post.<sup>109</sup> It was preferred that diplomats subvert their personal politics to state concerns and positions. Despite these efforts of consolidation, some Spanish diplomats who remained in exile for a prolonged period of time developed an active opposition to the new regime, assuming functions representative of the republican government in exile, especially in the years following the end of the Second World War.<sup>110</sup> The fact is Franco inherited diplomatic corps never formed in fascist ideology or schooled by the new regime and it appears he only began moving to change it about 1942.

The actions taken by Spanish diplomats abroad during World War Two are directly connected to the history of the Spanish diplomatic corps. For one, it is clear that the majority of

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<sup>108</sup> “acreditar buena conducta e irreprochables antecedentes morales y sociales”: Valdivielso, *La Carrera Diplomática en España*, 44.

<sup>109</sup> Valdivielso, *La Carrera Diplomática en España*, 58.

<sup>110</sup> Pérez, *Las depuraciones de la carrera diplomática española*, 172.



diplomats came from the higher echelons of society; these class, cultural, and educational connections were shared by the Sephardim and may have added an element of empathy, which may account for the life-saving actions. Additionally, it is clear that Franco did not establish a clear agenda for his diplomats or an institutionalized training system prior to 1942.<sup>111</sup> This institutionalization suggests that Franco knew that his diplomats were acting however they saw fit, and he did not feel confident in their choices. The 1942 institutionalization of the diplomatic corps was Franco's attempt to correct this problem and to create a cohort of diplomats that was an extension of his regime with the same ideological leanings.

Finally, it is reasonable to surmise that the Spanish Civil War had a profound impact on the Spanish diplomatic corps. Archival documents and secondary sources suggest in various ways that these diplomats were nationalists, believing strongly that they were Spanish, not part of a larger fascist fabric that Germany was molding in Europe. This Spanish form of fascism wielded its own power and had its own ideologies independent of German National Socialism. In this context, the Sephardim, recently offered citizenship, become symbols of Spanish national pride: where the other states in Europe were ignoring the threats to Jews from Nazi Germany, diplomats could fashion Spain as an enlightened exception, consistent with Franco's ideology surrounding the self-fashioning of his own unique and exceptional regime.

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<sup>111</sup> Valdivielso, *La Carrera Diplomática en España*, 27.

While some of these diplomats may have actively chosen to work in opposition to the Franco regime out of political difference, others may have worked against their government purely because they were doing what they thought was morally right. Additionally, in the anti-Jewish climate of Nazi-occupied Europe, perhaps some Spanish diplomats, in their role as representatives of their country abroad, felt a personal sense of shame regarding their country's charged history related to the Jews. Due their country's past, maybe they hoped to do their part to avoid another, modern wrongdoing to these Spaniards (and Jews).

### **Discussion of Spanish Diplomats**

While the motives behind Franco's actions were opportunistic, this does not undermine the humanitarian work that Spanish diplomats did on behalf of the Sephardim in a separate vein from the Franco regime. Their actions can be explained by a variety of factors – the lack of institutionalization of the Spanish diplomatic corps following the Civil War, the upper-class status of these diplomats who shared class connections with the Sephardim, and their distance from the regime. The farther these diplomats were located from Spain, the further they were able to push the bounds of the bureaucratic power and the more subversive actions they could get away with. Despite these diplomats' brave actions, Spain's relations with Germany during World

War Two and its subsequent diplomatic problems with Israel sadly prevented them from being fully recognized for their role in saving Jewish lives during World War Two.<sup>112</sup>

As discussed previously, Ashkenazi Jews, such as Mireille, were able to escape to freedom by crossing Spain's border. Yet the majority of Jews saved by Spain's efforts were the Sephardim who lived in a diaspora far outside of Spain's borders. Often times, Spanish diplomats invoked the Primo de Rivera decree of December 20, 1924 to receive Spain's protection. And while Franco in particular sent ambivalent messages, many of Spain's Jews enjoyed energetic and strong consular protection by a number of Spanish diplomats. These Spanish bureaucrats expressed a personal stake in the wellbeing of the Sephardim in a major contrast from Franco and his motives. This network of consuls and diplomats treated and considered these Spanish Jews as Spaniards and deserving of Spain's aid. On Spain's border, diplomats in France were able to save many Sephardim by disregarding Spain's orders without serious consequence. At a distance from Spain, diplomats in Greece and Bulgaria were able to push their insubordination to its limits. Ultimately, both Franco's own ambiguous policies in conjunction with a long, bloody, and ironic Jewish past creates a compelling framework for

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<sup>112</sup> Spain and Israel did not establish diplomatic relations until 1986, making Spain the last Western European country to officially recognize Israel. From Israel's establishment in 1948 up until this formal declaration, Spanish-Israeli relations were characterized by failed diplomatic efforts and periods of hostility.

understanding the consular aid granted by many Spanish diplomats throughout Europe as a case of its own.

### Chapter 3: Diplomacy at the Border: Bernardo Rolland of France<sup>113</sup>



Figure 6: Distance from Spain to France, 625.5 miles.

*Source:* googlemaps.com.

#### Background

In France, Spanish diplomats were notorious for aiding the Sephardim. In contrast to the far distances from Spain to Greece, France was much closer to home, located on Spain's border (see figure 6). Geography created a common boundary, across which refugees fled. This

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<sup>113</sup> See appendix (pages 152-153) for corresponding timeline for this chapter.

geography is what put the Spanish diplomats in Spain in such an important position. This common boundary also allowed Spain to wield greater control over its diplomats and their subversive actions. Geography afforded diplomats greater discretion as their network with Spain became more distant. This geography combined with the fact that Spain had begun to claim Sephardim as citizens in the late nineteenth century understanding worked in conjunction with each other and resulted in Spain's diplomats saving many Jews from France. Despite the Spanish regime's efforts, Spanish diplomats, particularly Bernardo Rolland, Consul General of Paris, were still able to use various means of deception, rule bending, and exceptions to help save Spanish Jews.

First, border control and Spanish-French and Spanish-German relations regarding refugees crossing the border will be discussed to put diplomatic aid into context. Then, the heroic work of Spanish Consul General of Paris, Bernardo Rolland, will be discussed to provide an example of Spanish-diplomatic efforts on behalf of the Sephardim as a close proximity to Spain. The combination of beneficial neglect on behalf of Franco and the willingness of Spanish diplomats to help created the ideal situation for the rescue of Sephardim. Specifically, Spanish diplomats helped the Sephardim in two key ways: they issued transit visas and protected their property as an extension of Spanish property. The bureaucratic system helps to explain the discrepancies between Spain's instructions and diplomatic actions.

## **Sephardic Refugees from France**

Spanish diplomats helped the large number of Jewish refugees<sup>114</sup> who crossed the Spanish-French border after the German occupation of France (see figure 8). During World War Two, France and its allies were defeated in the Battle of France and signed an armistice with Germany on June 22, 1940. The terms set forth by this armistice designated the north and west region of France as a zone to be occupied by the German army. France, headed by Philippe Petain,<sup>115</sup> was subordinated to the Germans. The rest of the country remained a “free zone.”

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<sup>114</sup> I use refugee here to describe individuals fleeing their country of origin to escape Nazi domination.

<sup>115</sup> Vichy France, the regime following the Third Republic, is a common term to describe the government of France that collaborated with the Axis powers from July 1940 to August 1944, during the Second World War.



Figure 8: Map of Pyrenees Mountains on the border of Spain and France.

*Source:* [www.worldatlas.com](http://www.worldatlas.com).

The arrival of the Germans resulted in a massive surge of refugees trying to cross the Pyrenees into unoccupied Spain. These refugees were largely Jews from France and other locales in Europe; they were joined in flight by Spaniards and other Europeans (Jews and non-Jews) who did not want to be subjected to German control. Most of the refugees entered Spain from Vichy France (see figure 9). Therefore, the geographical location of Spain placed it in a strategic and historically significant location.





Figure 9: Map showing borders of Vichy and Occupied France.

Source: [www.oocities.org](http://www.oocities.org).

Sephardim as well as Jews from Germany and elsewhere in Europe began passing through Spain as early as 1939, the majority with proper documentation and the majority of them were not returned to the Nazis.<sup>116</sup> However, as the war progressed and as the Germans made their way through Europe, the number of Jews without documentation rose exponentially. The statistics speak for themselves. Haim Avni concludes that 23,000 Jews of various countries crossed the Pyrenees between 1939 and 1944 whereas Bernd Rother poses an even higher number, 20,000 to 35,000.<sup>117</sup> There is absolutely no denying that many Jews, both Sephardic and

<sup>116</sup> Calvet, *Las Montañas de la libertad*, 269.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 134.

Ashkenazi, found the path to freedom by crossing the Spanish border. Flight into Spain was certainly not always without issue: though many Sephardim passed into Spain unchallenged, between 1942 and 1944, 10,000 to 12,000 Jews were arrested at the border and some were sent to Miranda de Ebro, the Spanish concentration camp.<sup>118</sup> Even when issues arose and regardless of an “arrest” at the hands of the Spanish was nowhere near equivalent to being sent to the death camps of Eastern Europe.<sup>119</sup> It is also noteworthy to realize that Jews and all other prisoners received the same treatment in Miranda de Ebro<sup>120</sup> and suffered no form of religious persecution (see figure 10).<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>120</sup> Miranda de Ebro was established first as a concentration camp for foreign prisoners during the Spanish Civil War and later was the location where refugees without representative diplomats were placed during the Second World War. Many of these individuals included Jews. The conditions of the camp were poor due to lack of resources and population saturation, but the lives of those interned were never at stake. In the words of French Jew Henri Lombart, “Despite difficulty of camp, must clarify/explain the meaning of hardship: ‘our life was never in danger at any moment. I think of my wife and mother who knew 36 months of horror in Ravensbruck and Dachau’”: Calvet, *Las Montañas de la libertad*, 230.

<sup>121</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 149.



Figure 10: Miranda de Ebro Concentration Camp in Spain. *Source:* jaff40s.blogspot.com.

At the same time, some scholars argue that many prisoners were, in fact, returned to the French police, which was under the control of the Gestapo. Accordingly, the Germany embassy in Madrid, which exercised a great deal of influence on internal and external politics, took a particular interest in the movement of Jews across the Spanish border and went to great lengths to stop this movement.<sup>122</sup> From 1942 and onward, the Gestapo installed itself in various cities such as Marseille and Perpignan in Vichy France with the very objective of supervising border control.<sup>123</sup>

The naming of Francisco Gómez Jordana as Spain's minister of foreign affairs in 1942 in place of Ramón Serrano Suñer<sup>124</sup> was a key factor in the treatment of refugees.<sup>125</sup> While Serrano

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<sup>122</sup> Carcedo. *Entre bestias y héroes*, 30.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>124</sup> Ramón Serrano was a Spanish politician during the first stages of General Francisco Franco's dictatorship and was the Interior and Foreign Affairs Minister until 1942. He was particularly known for his pro-Third Reich stance

Suñer was a Nazi sympathizer, Gomez Jordana had closer ties with the allies and was more willing to help Jewish refugees. The German embassy in Spain chose to acknowledge the mass arrival of refugees in Spain and the various networks of protection available to them, and was quick to denounce the Spanish government.<sup>126</sup> Throughout September 1940, Spain opened and closed its border multiple times and on March 25, 1943, Spain caved again to German pressure and closed the border and reinforce its border control. During this time, thousands of Jewish families in France moved between the Spanish and Portuguese consuls in an effort to find any means of gaining entrance to the sanctified Iberian Peninsula.<sup>127</sup>

An informant from the Spanish consul in Hendaye best described the situation of these refugees: “these people in a large part Jews of distinct nationalities, dominated by true panic, want to enter Spain at any cost....”<sup>128</sup> It is important to realize the severity of the conditions of this journey; crossing the Pyrenees was a dangerous endeavor in which refugees faced freezing

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during World War II, when he supported the sending of the Blue Division to fight along with the Wehrmacht in the Russian front.

<sup>125</sup> Calvet, *Las Montañas de la libertad*, 108.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>128</sup> Estas personas, en su mayor parte judíos de distintas nacionalidades, dominadas por verdadero pánico, querían entrar en España a toda costa: Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 42.

temperatures, starvation, treacherous terrain, and perhaps worst of all, the wrath of the Gestapo.<sup>129</sup> In crossing the Pyrenees, survival was largely a matter of chance.

## **Border Control**

A letter from Perpignan written on November 27, 1942 sheds light on the nature of border closure for it places the onus of the closure of the border on the French authorities. This letter, from an unnamed Spanish consulate member, is addressed to Spain and expresses the great impact that this closure had on the consulate due to its “geographic” position. It is possible that the author of this note intended to remain anonymous, thus helping to protect diplomats from punishment at the hands of the Spanish government. Ultimately, the letter discusses the difficulties that this border closure has placed on both individuals with Spanish passports and Spanish families detained at the border. The consulate member ultimately begs Spain to “reopen the frontier or obtain special treatment” from the Vichy authorities.<sup>130</sup>

This document demonstrated the difference in policy advocated by the Spanish bureaucrats (albeit unnamed) and the Spanish government at large. Franco’s regime supported the closure of the border because it served as a means of curtailing Nazi complaints and proving

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<sup>129</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 88.

<sup>130</sup> Letter: November 27, 1942: Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

themselves as “trustworthy” allies despite their otherwise lack of involvement in the war. Yet this policy was strongly opposed by the Spanish consulates across France. Not only was it difficult to refuse desperate petitioners, but the policy added an extra element of responsibility to consular work. This was because these officials had to manage the affairs of those turned away from the border with visas, those detained, etc. While Jews are not explicitly mentioned in this document, it can be assumed that many of those holding Spanish visas were of Jewish ethnicity. It appears that these bureaucrats in question felt that regular Spanish citizens and Jewish-Spanish citizens were not irreconcilable categories.

On December 10, 1942,<sup>131</sup> the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, arguably because of the complaints elicited by Spanish consuls in France, wrote a letter to the French embassy. This letter discusses the difficulties faced by consuls, particularly those in the south of France along the Spanish border. The letter admits that consular officials are unable to resolve the problems of refugees trapped at the border without the help of French authorities and describes the current situation as a “vicious cycle with grave consequences for many people.”<sup>132</sup> As a result of this opinion, the letter informs the French authorities that the Ministry would “greatly appreciate” the French embassy granting Spain special treatment “with the urgency that the case requires” to

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<sup>131</sup> Described as a “nota verbal” in archival documents, I am not exactly sure what a verbal note is. I am guessing that it was a note dictated by a bureaucrat and recorded/sent to another embassy.

<sup>132</sup> Verbal Note: December 10, 1942, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

deal with those detained at the border.<sup>133</sup> Ultimately, while the closure of the border between France and Spain is controversial and speaks to Spain's alignment with Germany and occupied France, these documents indicate that Spain's loyalties down the diplomatic line were not so clear-cut. Even while initially agreeing to close the border the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to petition France to reopen the border. As the war progressed, it is clear that the Spanish regime opportunistically agreed to keep the border open to ingratiate themselves with the allies who were winning the war.

Even more surprising than such Spanish appeals to reopen the border, numerous as they were, is the conciliatory way in which Germany responded. The German embassy's response to the Minister of Foreign Affairs's December 10, 1942 verbal note reveals that the Germans issued a new decree referring to the "passage on the frontier through France and Switzerland." This decree allowed for people "who have obtained permission" in the form of a Spanish visas to continue in transit while they kept the frontier closed for those without proper documentation. Officially, this was a policy that Spain endorsed as well (even though some Spanish diplomats conveniently overlooked those cases without proper visas). For their part, the French Embassy expressed a similar sentiment to the Germans in their Verbal Note to Spain, saying that Vichy authorities will directly intervene to "greet Spanish subjects that have justified reasons" to leave

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

France. Of course, the evident accord on these matters can be seen as superficial: the terminology of “justified reasons” clearly leaves a great deal of leeway for interpretation.

Despite the overriding closure of the border as ordered by Spain, many Spanish diplomats were eager to find loopholes in this policy and personally appealed to local authorities. A message written by an anonymous consul member of Perpignan, the very location where Mireille’s own family crossed the border, noted the arrival of an expedition of Sephardim heading to Spain that arrived at the closed border without authorization of the Germany authorities of Vichy France in order to pass through Port-Bou. This consul member describes the vigorous formalities considered sufficient to gain the permission of the German authorities of Perpignan and the difficulty of the situation overall. As a result, the Spanish embassy was “trying to obtain authorization from Vichy so that they [the Sephardim] can cross the border” which clearly reveals the work of some diplomats on behalf of the Spanish Jews. Due to this work as well as subsequent pressure from the allies, the Spanish government eventually reopened its border.<sup>134</sup>

Overall, Allied pressure played a major role in influencing Spanish policy as explicitly stated by Prime Minister Churchill to a Spanish Ambassador in London: “if the Spanish government went the length of preventing these unfortunate people seeking safety from the

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<sup>134</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 146.



horror of Nazi domination, and if they went further and committed the offense of actually handing them back to the German authorities, that would be the destruction of good relations.”<sup>135</sup> Spain was left in a difficult position: trying to ingratiate both the Germans, with whom they wanted to appear as an equal partner and the Allies, whose success became more and more apparent as the war progressed.

Many individuals cite the closing of the Spanish border as an example of German-Spanish cooperation during the war. However, discerning the true sentiments of any of the war parties is a difficult task. The behavior of the French authorities was “unpredictable” and “did not respond to unified criteria.”<sup>136</sup> The same goes for Spain. A sense of improvisation and inventiveness, which corresponded with the development of the war, characterized the politics of Franco’s regime.<sup>137</sup> For instance, Franco initially complied very much with the Nazi regime. But later on, as the tide of the war changed, this complicity began to deteriorate.<sup>138</sup> As early as August 1942, the U.S. Embassy in Madrid obtained a guarantee from the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that no illegal refugees, namely Jews, would be returned to their country against their will.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 43.

<sup>136</sup> Calvet, *Las Montañas de la libertad*, 277.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>139</sup> Rother. *Franco y el Holocausto*, 145.

Additionally, in the spring of 1943 Jews began inundating Spain due to Spain's new favoritism towards the Allies.<sup>140</sup> By 1944, the Spanish government worked to ease the conditions for the repatriation of Jews to the United States and Latin America, including those Jews without clear-cut ties to Spain.<sup>141</sup> Once in Spain, vast networks of international aid organizations, such as JOINT, the Red Cross, and the Jewish Distribution Committee (JDC)<sup>142</sup> were available to help these Jewish refugees.<sup>143</sup>

### **Spanish Diplomats in France**

Spanish diplomats in France were notorious for failing to follow Spain's orders in many of the several consulates that operated in France under the supervision of the ambassador in Vichy, José Félix Lequerica. In many cases, although they cloaked their language in complex, vague, and bureaucratic language, Spanish diplomats in France acknowledged the special protection rights of the Sephardim as well as Spain's job to protect them. For instance, secretary of the Spanish bureau of commerce in France, Jose de Olozaga, took it upon himself to encourage the heads of the foreign ministry to support the rights of "Spanish nationals," or in

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<sup>140</sup> Calvet, *Las Montañas de la libertad*, 143.

<sup>141</sup> Rother. *Franco y el Holocausto*, 318.

<sup>142</sup> The JDC had headquarters located in Barcelona and Madrid until 1941 and was directed by Joseph Schwartz.

<sup>143</sup> Calvet, *Las Montañas de la libertad*, 144.

other words, the Sephardim.<sup>144</sup> The mission of this initiative was to “base contacts with French authorities on the French-Spanish agreement of January 7, 1862 regarding the rights and mutual protection of interests of citizens [French and Spanish] of both countries.”<sup>145</sup> Olozaga achieved his goal of protecting citizen rights when on March 7, 1942 when the Spanish foreign ministry wrote to Ambassador Lequerica: “Upon instructions from the foreign ministry...you are requested to defend the interests of Jewish nationals of Spanish origin by demanding the French authorities to comply with the 1862 agreement.”<sup>146</sup>

Similarly, the Spanish consul in Marseille ignored Madrid’s orders and on February 1, 1943 required the ignominious label *juif*<sup>147</sup> be removed from both ration cards and personal documents for Spanish Jews.<sup>148</sup> The consul’s superiors in Madrid later undid this action. Such a contradiction in the actions of a working diplomat and his distant superior reveals the attitudes of many Spanish diplomats located in France, among them Bernardo Rolland, the consul general of Spain in Paris. Rolland is constantly named as a crucial figure in the repatriation of Jews, both Sephardic and Ashkenazi (see figure 11).<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 88.

<sup>145</sup> Avni, *ibid.* and Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 41.

<sup>146</sup> Avni, *ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> French for Jew, this label identified and singled out Jews from the larger population, which often resulted in poor treatment and discrimination.

<sup>148</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 163.

<sup>149</sup> Ysart, *España y los judíos*, 113.



Figure 11: Bernardo Rolland de Miota: Consul General of Spain in Paris.

*Source:* [www.raoulwallenberg.net](http://www.raoulwallenberg.net).

Rolland distinguished himself from other diplomats in a variety of ways, most notably for his work as a “civil servant of prestige and as a person with profound humanitarian sentiments that undoubtedly suggested he would be able to do what he could to help in the difficult situation he found himself in.”<sup>150</sup> For one, he occasionally stood up to his ambassador, Jose Félix Lequerica and urged him to contradict France’s pro-Nazi government when it came to matters regarding

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<sup>150</sup> “Funcionario de prestigio y persona con profundos sentimientos humanitarios, no dudo en plantearse que podría hacer para ayudarles en la difícil situación en que se encontraban”: Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 42.

Jews.<sup>151</sup> Such disagreements made for a tense relationship between the two men. Moreover, in moments when the embassy seemed far away from Vichy and the Spanish consul in Paris, Rolland openly disregarded instructions that he considered “unjust and which went against his conscience.”<sup>152</sup> Rolland relied on Spain’s decree of 1924, which considered the Sephardim as Spaniards and did not view the “Jew” and the Spaniard” as incompatible categories. As a result, Rolland used this decree on numerous occasions as legal grounds for his actions. This mentality deeply irked the Germans stationed in Vichy France due to the important role played by Vichy as a transit zone from France to Spain for many refugees. This is evidenced by German Ambassador Otto Abetz’s complaints in a letter sent to his ministry:

[I]t is confirmed that the Spaniards have a great interest in protecting the Jews of Spanish nationality from the application of the German decrees against the Jews...these men [the Spanish diplomats] don’t understand the explanation that all the Jews, without exception, are obligated to be inscribed in the registry and that exceptions are inadmissible. They don’t see any difference between the concept of Jews and Spaniard. The Jews of Spanish nationality they consider Spaniards, not Jews.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> <http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/saviors/diplomats/spanish/diplomats-52/bernardo-rolland-de-miota/>

<sup>152</sup> “Injusta y chocaban con su conciencia”: Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 44.

<sup>153</sup> “Se constata que los españoles tienen un gran interés en proteger a los judíos de nacionalidad española de la aplicación de los decretos alemanes contra los judíos...estos señores (los diplomáticos españoles) no entendieron la explicación de por que todos los judíos, sin excepción, están obligados a inscribirse en el registro y que excepciones son admisibles...no ven ninguna diferencia entre los conceptos judío y español. A los judíos de nacionalidad española los consideran españoles y no judíos”: Ibid.

Abetz was not the only one to make such a report. The German embassy was full of complaints regarding Spanish consulates that showed special zeal in the defense of the Sephardim and their interests.<sup>154</sup> In this case, it seems that a sense of selectivity existed in which diplomats often *chose* not to understand the difference between Jew and Spaniard.

Consistent with his protection of Sephardim as Spaniards, Rolland fought the *Statutes des Juifs*, adopted in Vichy France in 1940-41 (see figure 12). This set of laws discriminated in various ways against French Jews in an effort to differentiate them from the rest of the French populace. Rolland's efforts succeeded in 1942 when it became impossible for Vichy authorities to confiscate the Sephardim's property. In doing so, Rolland helped to assert Spain's dominance in the region. By claiming the Sephardim, Spain claimed the Spanish presence and dominance over their assets by extension. This can be viewed through the lens of an imperialist framework; the Spanish could spread its control and power through a trans-national Jewish diaspora that could claim Spanish citizenship. By reclaiming the property of the Sephardim, Spanish diplomats were effectively "reclaiming" the Sephardim as Spanish citizens.

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<sup>154</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 90.



Figure 12: Jewish Statutes passed in France. *Source:* jssnews.com.

Additionally, Rolland contacted German authorities in Paris in a risky initiative to repatriate 2,000 Spanish nationals to the Spanish-controlled zone of Morocco. Franco's regime ultimately rejected this endeavor.<sup>155</sup> He also appealed to the Spanish embassy in Berlin in August of 1941 and actively intervened in favor of Spanish nationals to remove them from the Drancy<sup>156</sup> internment camp.<sup>157</sup> Without consulting those who would surely not authorize such efforts, Rolland took persistent and determined action, risking his personal welfare as well as status.<sup>158</sup>

While Bernardo Rolland is the best-known diplomat for his work in freeing Sephardim interned at Drancy, other consuls, such as the one in Marseille, also contributed to this activity.

<sup>155</sup> Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews*, 113.

<sup>156</sup> The Drancy internment camp was an assembly and detention camp located close to Paris in Vichy France. Many Jews were first sent to Drancy and were later deported to the extermination camps.

<sup>157</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 88.

<sup>158</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 63.

In a letter dated January 14, 1944, the consul in Marseille discussed the situation of the Sephardi D. Semaya de Mayo Misrachi who was detained in Drancy. In this letter, the consul members demand that Mr. Mayo “ought to be considered as Spaniards, and protected as such” and insisted on the “immediate liberation of the detained.”<sup>159</sup> Another letter, dated February 19, 1943 written in Paris by Ambassador Lequerica himself also touches on this matter. According to Lequerica, “the consul in Marseille has informed me that nine Sephardim of Spanish nationality have been detained in Drancy (see figure 13). Immediately I demanded that they be freed.”<sup>160</sup> This equality of Spanish Jews to Catholic Spaniards in the eyes of Spanish diplomats in France is discernible in these documents.

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<sup>159</sup> Letter: January 14, 1944, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>160</sup> Letter: February 19, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.





Figure 13: Location of Drancy, a German internment camp, in France. *Source:* www.ushmm.org.

Even for French Jews, Rolland and other Spanish diplomats offered similar services of aid. For instance, in September of 1943, despite Germany's pressures, Spain evacuated French citizens (some of who were Jews) from the coast of Cadiz, Algeciras and Malaga.<sup>161</sup> Even though Rolland finished his term as Consul General in Paris in mid-1943, it is clear that his efforts to help the Jews of France influenced the decision to make these evacuations happen.<sup>162</sup> Overall, it is clear that Rolland was subversive within the bounds of the power given to him and used the bureaucratic structure to work in his favor.

<sup>161</sup> <http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/saviors/diplomats/spanish/diplomats-52/bernardo-rolland-de-miota/>

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

Despite efforts by both Rolland and other Spanish diplomats in France, at certain point during the war Jordana (the Spanish foreign minister) unequivocally forbade the increase in the number of Jews coming to Spain. Yet even with Madrid's inhibitive orders, Spanish representatives in Paris refused to stop defending the property of Spanish Jews.<sup>163</sup> This insubordination became such a problem in fact that on October 8, 1940, Madrid issued a decree which prevented Spanish consuls from granting transit visas without first sending all requests by telegraph to Spain.<sup>164</sup> In this way, the Spanish regime highlighted the great contradiction that existed in the way in which the Spanish diplomat corps and Franco's central administration were handling the same issue.<sup>165</sup> This issue speaks to the very nature of bureaucracy and the difficulty in squaring the actions of the central Spanish government with those of its diplomats.<sup>166</sup>

In the issuing of visas, Spanish diplomats were able to push the bounds of the bureaucratic system and ignore explicit instructions from Franco's regime. Lequerica wrote in a letter written on April 3, 1943, "[I]nstructions have been transmitted to our consuls recommending that they take the maximum scruple in their execution. I've also asked for information about the Sephardim's petitions for entrance in Spain that have already been

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<sup>163</sup> Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews*, 111.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>165</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 140.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

repatriated...and that the rest remain waiting until the consuls send me their information and we study it precisely.” Less than three weeks later, Lequerica writes from Paris again, addressing the insubordination of consuls in adhering to this request. He writes, “Spanish consuls, particularly those in Marseille, have allowed numerous instances of Sephardim, none of who have the proper documentation necessary as indicated by Spain in the previous telegram, to enter.” While specific names of diplomats accused of these actions are not given, these documents speak to the pervasive “problem” of permissiveness towards Sephardim entering Spain. This is also important because these consuls were in Vichy, a location through which many refugees escaped, while the ambassador was in Paris.

In addition to diplomatic aid, countless Spanish civilians living close to the border offered a welcoming hand to these refugees. As described by North American journalist Tad Schulz:

Close to 25 years ago, I had my first sight of Madrid. I was 14 and my mom and I had fled France as the Nazi troops advanced. We had crossed the French-Spanish border in the Pyrenees and took a bus that brought us over the mountains to the town of Lerida. There we spent the night in the house of a beautiful young woman who always wore black. Her husband had been killed in the civil war which had ended a year previously, but I never found out on what side he fought. Even though we didn’t know a word of Spanish, the widower and her family showed us compassion and kindness with gestures and smiles. They offered us abundant

food despite the fact that this was a country suffering from war.”<sup>167</sup>

At the same time, however, not all of the help Jews received upon crossing the border was motivated by humanitarian sentiments. Many Spanish guides familiar with the mountainous terrain, for instance, served as *passeurs*, who for financial gain, guided refugees across the border.<sup>168</sup>

Beyond these solitary Spanish individuals, extensive networks of aid existed throughout France dedicated to helping Spanish diplomats aid refugees in their escape to Spain. One notorious network was the Pat O’Leary network which helped both evading servicemen<sup>169</sup> and Jewish refugees alike escape from the north of France to Marseille and across the Pyrenees mountains.<sup>170</sup> Nationalists and anarchists aided this network, most of who were Spanish exiles

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<sup>167</sup> “Hace casi un cuarto de siglo antes, semana más o menos, hice mi primera visita a Madrid. Tenía entonces catorce años y mi madre y yo huíamos de Francia adelantándonos a las tropas Nazis que avanzaba. Habíamos cruzado la frontera franco-española en pleno Pirineo y tomamos un destartalado autobús que nos llevó por tortuosas carreteras de montaña hasta un pueblo cerca de Lérida. Allí pasamos la noche en la casa de una bonita joven mujer siempre vestida de negro. Su marido había resultado muerto en la Guerra Civil, que había terminado hacía poco más de un año, pero nunca me enteré de qué lado había luchado. En aquel entonces no sabíamos nada de español pero la viuda y su familia nos mostraban su compasión y simpatía con gestos y sonrisas. Nos ofrecieron comida abundante a pesar de que el país, asolado por la Guerra, estaba casi al borde del hambre, y que, evidentemente, era un sacrificio alimentar a forasteros”: quoted in Ysart, *España y los judíos en la segunda Guerra mundial*, 51-52.

<sup>168</sup> Calvet, *Las Montañas de la libertad*, 50.

<sup>169</sup> Men who were drafted to fight in their country’s army but did not agree politically or ideologically with the side of the war their country was fighting on or who just did not want to fight. These men defected and ran away from their position in the army.

<sup>170</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 169.

willing to risk their lives in the face of the Gestapo and French soldiers.<sup>171</sup> The center of the Pat O’Leary operations was Hotel Paris in Toulouse, where groups gathered together and embarked on their perilous mission at dawn.<sup>172</sup> The proximity to the escape routes through Spain from a strategic viewpoint made this route one of the most successful throughout the war. In fact, famous journalist Varian Fry<sup>173</sup> spearheaded the existence of this escape route during World War Two.<sup>174</sup> Ultimately, this network owed much of its success to the fact that it maintained particularly good contact with Spanish diplomats throughout the process of housing and guiding those who passed secretly across the Spanish-French border.<sup>175</sup> This secret underground network highlights the commitment and risk-taking that went on which was well outside the normal bounds of diplomatic work.

At the end of the day, the majority of Jewish refugees who managed to cross the border, both legally and illegally, were ultimately not turned in to the Germans.<sup>176</sup> Diplomats, Spanish citizens, and extensive aid networks worked in conjunction to help save these Jews. Despite the fact that the Franco regime “oscillated almost schizophrenically” the actual Spanish consuls in

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>173</sup> An American journalist, Fry ran a rescue network in Vichy France that helped approximately 2,000 to 4,000 anti-Nazi and Jewish refugees to escape Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.

<sup>174</sup> Calvet, *Las Montañas de la libertad*, 18.

<sup>175</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 179.

<sup>176</sup> Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II*, 220.

France remained committed to their country's citizens.<sup>177</sup>

### **Theories of Bureaucracy Applied on the Border**

Clearly then, individuals in the different levels of the Spanish state apparatus held differing positions on the proper course of action to take with respect to a very important topic—the Sephardim. Current historiography treats Spanish diplomats as a separate entity from the Spanish government yet fails to delve into the question of *why* Spanish diplomats locations worked to save the Jews. What factors influenced these diplomats and made them so open to disregarding their government's instructions? Did some have Jewish relatives, roots, or even Jewish blood? Were they secretly opposed to the Franco regime? Or was there something in their training that influenced their mentality towards the Jews? This was likely a concept of the Spanish nation-state that included Sephardim—as it had developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup> -- centuries. That sense of Spanish nationhood overrode the political exigencies of the Franco regime. Franco's policy shifted according to his evaluation of who was likely to come out on top in World War Two. Unfortunately, part of the reason the historiography in this facet of Spanish history is lacking is that information regarding these questions is hard to come by.

Based on the words and works of other diplomats describing their experiences abroad, one feasible hypothesis explaining the paradigm of Spanish diplomatic action abroad during

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<sup>177</sup> Rohr, *The Spanish Right and the Jews*, 118.

World War Two is the personal ties they felt to the Sephardim due to the latter group's historical and cultural relationship with Spain. The case of Bernardo Rolland is unique due to the close proximity France had to Spain. This proximity to Spain limited its actions and subjected him to tighter control by the Franco regime than Radigales in Greece and Palencia in Bulgaria. Additionally, the shared border between Vichy and Spain, with a tiny part of the border between occupied France and Spain helped many refugees escape. With this in mind, it is interesting to see where the bounds of power stopped as well as the different forms of power violations: speech, personal involvement, and family adoption.

## **Conclusion**

In light of the discussed diplomatic theories, it is clear that despite the fact that Spain operated as a "bureaucracy" and employed "bureaucrats" internationally to exercise Spain's authority, its diplomats to save as many Jews as it did abroad. At the same time, Spain certainly did not realize its full potential in the number of Jews it theoretically could have saved. If the Spanish government had been entirely on board with the wishes of its Spanish diplomats, many more Jews could have been saved. Thus, while the disorganization of the Spanish bureaucracy was useful to the Spanish diplomats it also hindered a full-scale refugee relief effort. Especially

when compared to the “powerful and effective mechanization of the German bureaucracy which didn’t delay,”<sup>178</sup> the Spanish bureaucracy in actuality was somewhat incompetent, slow to act, and confusing in its instructions. This speaks to the inherent confusion and unclear agenda of the Franco regime with respect to the Sephardim and serves to highlight further the humanitarian efforts of the Spanish diplomats as a separate entity from the Franco administration as well as to explain why these diplomats were able to act in the way that they did.

The two following chapters deal with the humanitarian efforts of Sebastián Romero de Radigales in Greece and Julio Palencia in Bulgaria. These diplomats had a greater degree of freedom than Bernardo Rolland by virtue of the fact that they were located a greater distance from Spain. The importance of the shared Franco-Spanish border in making the situation particularly acute for Rolland is also important to recognize. His lack of this border farther from Spain allowed Spanish diplomats in locations such as Greece and Bulgaria to push the limits of bureaucracy and use the bureaucratic structure to their advantage to help save as many Spanish Jews as possible. The reasons for *why* these diplomats acted the way they did still remains enigmatic but possible explanations are given to explain this conundrum.

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<sup>178</sup> “La potente y eficaz maquinaria burocrática alemana no se demoró”: Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 150.



## **Chapter 4: Diplomacy at a Distance: Sebastián Romero de Radigales of Greece<sup>179</sup>**

### **Bureaucracy Operation**

Both Sebastián Romero de Radigales in Greece and Julio Palencia in Bulgaria were Spanish diplomats that operated at a considerable distance from the Franco regime. Because of this, they exercised greater autonomy than Spanish diplomats stationed in France. The distance of both Greece and Bulgaria from Spain only exacerbated the difficulty of communication at this time. This distance made these diplomats' protection of Sephardim easier to accomplish. The importance of communication technology in diplomacy, especially when diplomats operate from a distance, has always played an important role in diplomatic instruction.

During World War Two, poor communication technology was compounded with the fact that Franco's government did not give clear instructions regarding the Sephardim. This lack of communication left Spanish diplomats in a position where they had to make their own decisions, in some cases using this power to help the Jews. At other times, lack of information hindered Spanish diplomats' efforts help without the backing of their larger government. This freedom resulted in many cases where diplomats either improvised without instructions or acted in direct opposition to instructions received in the hope that the lag time in diplomatic communication

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<sup>179</sup> See appendix (pages 154-155) for corresponding timeline for this chapter.

would mean that higher figures would overlook their infractions. Exploring the nature of the broader functioning of bureaucracy provides insight into how power functioned in a very diffuse way in the far reaches of the Franco regime. Both Franco and his diplomats often had different and competing agendas, and parties seem to have manipulated their knowledge of the system to their advantage. Because of this, it is important to view Spain not as a monolith but rather as made up of numerous branches operating on many different levels.

### **Greece, Pre- and Post-World War Two**



Figure 14: Distance from Spain to Greece, 1,917 miles.

*Source:* googlemaps.com.

Spain's relationship with the Sephardim of Greece is well known (see figure 14). The Sephardic community of Salonika, which is basically nonexistent today, was one of the largest in the world prior to World War Two.<sup>180</sup> Spain's connection with the Jewish community in Greece, specifically that of Salonika, goes back to 1912 when the Greeks conquered the city and openly targeted the Jews.<sup>181</sup> This event provided Spain with its first chance to extend protection to the Spanish Jews who exhibited considerable Spanish influence in the region.<sup>182</sup> In this case, the two countries reached an agreement in April 1915, but overall Spain was fairly reserved in providing aid to these Sephardim.<sup>183</sup> So historically, at least, the Sephardim have sometimes been tied to Spain's national and political interests.

Later on, Spain revealed its "selective" pro-Jewish sympathies when it signed agreements with Egypt in 1935 and Greece in 1936, which explicitly protected Sephardic families residing in these areas.<sup>184</sup> These treaties placed these Sephardim under Spanish consular protection and in December of 1948, Franco published a decree giving them the status of "Spanish citizens abroad."<sup>185</sup> Although these measures were beneficial to the Sephardim, we must take them with a

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<sup>180</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 98.

<sup>181</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 27.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>184</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 38.

<sup>185</sup> Rohr, *The Spanish right and the Jews*, 154.

grain of salt. The timing of these measures was certainly calculated: Israel had received international recognition from many members of the international community during this period and Franco used these treaties as a means to gain Jewish support within Israel which will be elaborated on in the conclusion.<sup>186</sup> Additionally, the Spanish were anxious about the Arab world and were interested in “world Jewish” support. In 1946 Franco had sought admission to the U.N. and Israel played a crucial role in its veto abilities to deny Spain admission from this institution and subsequently from receiving aid from the Marshall plan. Thus, Spain’s relationship with Greece was one based largely on the motive of national interest, which sometimes worked in the Spanish Jews’ favor. Franco’s pervasive concern with maintaining a positive global reputation similarly influenced Spain’s actions in Greece during World War Two with regard to the Sephardim.<sup>187</sup>

## **World War Two**

The case of Greece during World Word Two is particularly interesting because both the Germans and the Italians occupied it. Before 1941, there were approximately 60,000 Sephardic Jews living in Greece, but the Nazis murdered 90% of the Sephardim during the war.<sup>188</sup> In fact,

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 198.

<sup>188</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 98.

following World War Two, a mere 1,200 Spanish Jews remained in Greece, most of who eventually immigrated to Palestine.<sup>189</sup> These statistics speak to the complete devastation the Nazis caused Greece's Jewish population, despite the efforts of Spanish diplomats. The German occupation also brought about terrible hardships for the Greek civilian population at large, not just the Jews. Over 300,000 civilians died in Athens from starvation, and many thousands died as a result of reprisals by Nazis and their collaborators.

In 1941, the Nazis officially invaded Greece, which greatly affected the fate of the Sephardim residing there. The situation of the Jews remained normal until July of 1942 when the Germans implemented anti-Semitic policies in the zones of Greece where they exercised control.<sup>190</sup> In Italian controlled Athens, life remained normal for the Jews. In Salonika, however, the Nazi authorities instituted measures against the Jews such as the requirement to wear the Star of David on their clothing and the limits on their movement throughout the city.

The situation of these Spanish Jews grew more dire as German plans to evacuate and intern these Jews became apparent, and the Spanish government's need to take action and defend its compatriots' interests became obvious.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ysart, *España y los judios*, 4.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 65.

## German Policy in Greece

The Nazis issued an ultimatum on April 29, 1943 to embassies in Rome, Ankara, Madrid, Budapest, Bucharest, and Lisbon. In the ultimatum, which marked their official policy on the Sephardim, Berlin communicated to local governments that there would be an “increase in the general actions against the Jews in the zone of Salonika and suggested the repatriation of citizen Jews before the 15<sup>th</sup> of June this year.”<sup>192</sup> Thus, the Germans would permit the remaining Spanish Jews in their territory of occupied Greece to leave, granted that they be removed from the country by Spain before the 15<sup>th</sup> of June.<sup>193</sup> This would be done, according to the Germans, through a mass transport of Jews desiring repatriation, an action – and expense – that Franco was not willing to undertake. In this way, German policy toward the Sephardim in Greece and Bulgaria, differed from Nazi policy in northern and—especially—Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, the Italians controlled the zone of Athens, which greatly influenced Spanish diplomatic activity in the region. Spanish diplomats were able to bypass German demands made in Salonika by conspiring with the Italians. This made it easier for the two Catholic fascist regimes to reinforce each other’s policies toward Jews.

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<sup>192</sup> La ampliación de las medidas generales contra los judíos en la zona de Salónica y sugerir la repatriación de sus cuídanos judíos” antes del 15 del junio de aquel año: Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 100.

<sup>193</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 150.

## Franco's Vacillation

A wide gap existed between German demands and Franco's authorization of action, which enabled Radigales' efforts.<sup>194</sup> Even with pressure from its own diplomats, and numerous appeals by Spanish nationals, Franco's regime remained very reluctant to facilitate the repatriation of the Sephardim.<sup>195</sup> While Franco's regime did not explicitly say no to allowing the Jews to repatriate, it would not facilitate this action either. This was probably due to the high cost of transporting and repatriating the Spanish Jews, as well as Franco's desire to remain non-committal to any particular policy that could be seen as either pro or anti-Nazi. It is definitely possible that Franco intentionally delayed responding with the knowledge that some diplomats were sympathetic to the Jews and would protect them. In this way, he could allow these diplomats to help without deeply angering the Germans because he could argue that he did not authorize this action. These bureaucratic checks and balances were apolitical. They could work both ways and could be exploited to anyone's advantage if they knew how to work the system. In March 1943, the Germans began deporting Jews in Greece but made an exception for foreign nationals, such as Spanish Jews holding a valid Spanish passport.<sup>196</sup> As Germany began to narrow in on all Jews in Greece without exception, Spain initially agreed to repatriate all Jewish

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<sup>194</sup> Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 225.

<sup>195</sup> Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 88.

<sup>196</sup> Paldiel, *Diplomat heroes of the Holocaust*, 209.

nationals and “demanded they be treated as Spaniards in every respect.”<sup>197</sup> However, despite this promising declaration, Franco entirely changed his position in an abrupt and unanticipated fashion. Although no one knows the exact reason for this about-face, it is most likely attributable to the larger-than-expected number of Spanish Jews requesting repatriation.<sup>198</sup> Additionally, although the Germans agreed to the repatriation of the Spanish Jews, they demanded that Spain both organize and finance the entire process.<sup>199</sup> Franco, with Spain’s economy in shambles as a result of the Civil War, most likely did not want to commit the necessary sum to finance this endeavor. Thus, only one day after Germany accepted Spain’s terms, Spain reneged on its agreement to accept its Spanish Jews.<sup>200</sup> This one-day time frame indicates that this default may have been a power play – trying to appear as a strong state by pushing an agenda but secretly hoping it would be denied. International diplomacy is full of smoke and mirrors and it is difficult to ascertain the true motives in these tenuous situations.

There are also examples of Franco’s regime intentionally dragging its heels in the hopes of avoiding dealing with the issue and committing actual resources. In October of 1943, 155 Spanish Jews in Athens were arrested and deported to concentration camps, despite Radigales’

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<sup>197</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 154.

<sup>198</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 257.

<sup>199</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 152.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.



protests.<sup>201</sup> Later on, on December 22<sup>nd</sup> after much procrastination, Spanish officials contacted the foreign ministry in Berlin to reveal that they were finally ready to repatriate the Spanish Jews; this gesture, however, came far too late.<sup>202</sup> By the time an agreement was finally made between Berlin and Madrid, many of the Sephardim were on the verge of death.<sup>203</sup> It was not until February of 1944 when 367 Spanish-Jewish refugees from Salonika finally arrived in Spain that they were greeted in a “friendly and impressive” manner. But this reception hardly compensated for Spain’s ambivalent treatment of the Jews prior to this repatriation.<sup>204</sup> As scholar Eduardo Martín de Pozuelo put it, “the Sephardim arrived in Barcelona, ignorant of the background of their journey and believing that Franco had saved them.”<sup>205</sup> Thus, it appears that the Spanish government wanted to capitalize on its display of generosity as part of a show for the Allied powers.<sup>206</sup>

Bernd Rother best sums up the irony underlying Spain’s position: “[T]he fundamental contradiction was that on the one hand Spain did not want to tolerate the persecution of its Jews

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>202</sup> Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II*, 228.

<sup>203</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 158.

<sup>204</sup> Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 98.

<sup>205</sup> Finalmente, los sefardíes llegaron a Barcelona ignorantes del fondo de su odiseas y creyendo que franco les había salvado: Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 110.

<sup>206</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 158.

but on the other hand it was not ready to allow their immigration.”<sup>207</sup> Franco’s government was absolutely aware of the consequences awaiting Spanish Jews who it did not repatriate. Telegrams from numerous diplomats urgently warned of imminent danger to these Spanish citizens. Ultimately, even Spanish diplomats like Radigales were quick to point out that Spain’s behavior created a negative image of Spain in the international community, noting “all other governments had repatriated their Jews in Greece, even the Italian fascists.”<sup>208</sup> So, while foreign affairs considerations held important clout in Spain’s consideration of its Jews, economic motives proved paramount in shaping Spain’s final decisions.

### **Spanish Consul in Greece**

The Spanish consul in Greece played a vital role in communicating the situation of the Spanish Jews in Greece to Madrid and in advocating for Spain’s assistance despite the Spanish regime’s vacillating behavior. The Spanish consulate in Salonika was initially headed by Salomon Ezraty,<sup>209</sup> himself a Jew, whereas the Spanish consul in Athens was headed by Eduardo Gasset.<sup>210</sup> In mid-April 1943 the new Consul General Sebastián Romero de Radigales took over

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<sup>207</sup> Stanely G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II*, 222-223.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>209</sup> Head of the Spanish consulate in Salonika until the middle of April 1943 when Sebastián de Romero Radigales arrived to Athens as the new Consul General of Spain.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

in Athens.<sup>211</sup> While there is no conclusive evidence whether Ezraty and Radigales met, it is likely that the two diplomats knew each other and or had met. It is furthermore possible that Ezraty imposed a sense of moral obligation on Radigales and made him feel responsible for the Sephardim in Greece as he took over his post. An archival document written by Radigales indicates this: he claimed he “devoted his best efforts to protecting rights and welfare of Jewish protégés” from the moment he arrived in Greece or perhaps from the moment he met Ezraty.<sup>212</sup>

The sense of empathy Radigales felt for the Sephardim is obvious in a letter dated May of 1943 in which he describes the situation of the Sephardim of Spanish nationality residing in Greece as “extremely tragic.” In addition, in the same letter Radigales reveals that he personally “begged [that] the Jews [...] to be exempt from the restrictions placed upon them from the Greeks.”<sup>213</sup> He offered comfort and support the anguished Spanish Jewish community in Greece, reassuring them that “because their people and interests are safe, and that nothing can occur while there has been no agreement made about them between our government and the Third Reich.”<sup>214</sup> Despite these diplomatic efforts and Radigales’ empathy, most Jews were left to the Germans.

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>213</sup> Letter: October 14, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

A mere two weeks after Radigales arrived in Greece, Adolf Eichmann<sup>215</sup> arrived from Germany to create a special plan involving the transport of Greek Jews to the extermination camps in the East.<sup>216</sup> The Spanish consul responded rapidly to his arrival and communicated exactly what was occurring in Madrid, as well as the German plan to deport the Jews of Greece in phases. Without waiting for instructions, Radigales interviewed the German ambassador, Gunther Altenburg,<sup>217</sup> to obtain as much information regarding the deportation plans as possible and then urgently informed the Spanish government of what he learned.<sup>218</sup>

Radigales proposed numerous and innovative repatriation plans to Madrid, which demonstrated his personal efforts to save the Sephardim. One such plan included providing entry visas for Spanish Jews to either Spain or the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco.<sup>219</sup> He was also an emphatic supporter of repatriating Jews in groups or via group visas to allow the escape of as

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<sup>215</sup> A German Nazi SS lieutenant colonel and one of the major organizers of the Holocaust. Because of his organizational talents and ideological reliability, Eichmann was given the job of facilitating and managing the logistics of mass deportation of Jews to ghettos and extermination camps in German-occupied Eastern Europe.

<sup>216</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 150.

<sup>217</sup> Altenburg was a career diplomat whose first assignments took him to postings at Rome, Vienna and Bucharest. He remained involved with southeastern Europe throughout his career.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> The Spanish protectorate of Morocco was the area of Morocco under colonial rule by the Spanish empire. This protectorate was established by the Treaty of Fez in 1912 and ended in 1956, when both France and Spain recognized Moroccan independence. During WW2, many Spanish bureaucrats suggested sending Sephardim to this protectorate, some successfully and others not: Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 150.

many Jews as possible as quickly as possible.<sup>220</sup> He suggested on May 6, 1943 “if the Sephardim returning to Spain is not convenient, they can be distributed in populations of the zone of our [Moroccan] protectorate, in which there already exist many thousands of Hebrews that are of our nationality.” In this case, Radigales is referring to the Spanish protectorate of Morocco.

Radigales’ also demonstrated his inclination towards group passports a letter written in July of 1943 in which he told representatives in Madrid, “it is advisable, in the interest of saving time and work, that the expedition of the necessary passports, safe-conduct/pass are made in the form of a collective passport that require only one visa.”<sup>221</sup>

It is also apparent from this document that Radigales took advantage of the lack of definitive instructions and used this to his benefit. He said, “as this representation has not received any order to refrain from intervening in the favor of them, my predecessor continued to provide effective support and I, from the first moment, have done as much as possible to protect them.”<sup>222</sup>

When Radigales still failed to get Franco to take action, he decided to act of his own accord.<sup>223</sup> The fact that the Italians administered Athens held special significance for Radigales

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>221</sup> Letter: July 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>222</sup> Letter: May, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>223</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 150.

because he could negotiate face-to-face with the Italians to transport Sephardim from Athens.

For instance, he went so far as conspiring with Italian authorities, without consulting the

Germans, to transport the Sephardim from Salonika in the German zone to Italian-occupied

Athens.<sup>224</sup> Radigales' deception deeply angered Ambassador Altenberg who had specifically

requested that Radigales delay his talks with the Italian government until an agreement between

Spain and Germany had been reached.<sup>225</sup> In another desperate gesture, Radigales personally went

to a train station where Jews were boarding an Italian train bound for the death camp Auschwitz-

Birkenau.<sup>226</sup> While Radigales may not have known the full extent of the fate facing these

individuals in the atmosphere of confusion and misinformation of the times, he did know that he

would probably never see these Sephardim again. As a result, he obtained permission to remove

the Sephardim from this train; he then placed them on a train headed to the zone under Italian

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<sup>224</sup> The occupation of Greece by the Axis Powers began in April 1941 after the Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy invaded Greece, and lasted until Germany and her satellite Bulgaria withdrew from mainland Greece in October 1944. The occupation of Greece was divided between Germany, Italy and Bulgaria. After the Italian capitulation in September 1943, the Italian zone was taken over by the Germans: Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 226.

<sup>225</sup> Ysart, *España y los judíos*, 82.

<sup>226</sup> Network of concentration and extermination camps built and operated by the Third Reich in Polish areas annexed by Nazi Germany during World War II. It was the largest of the German concentration camps, consisting of Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II–Birkenau, Auschwitz III–Monowitz and 45 satellite camps.

control.<sup>227</sup> These 150 Spanish nationals were protected once they were in the Italian zone, and they later found a means of escaping to Palestine.<sup>228</sup>

Radigales invoked moral pleas and imposed a sense of public and international shame on Spain to force the Spanish government into taking action. He was especially privy to Italy's situation, another Fascist nation, and its efforts to help its own Jews. He wrote, "Italy effectively protects the Italian Jews residing in Greece and has the goal to send them to their country if they can't avoid expulsion." Radigales was clearly hinting to Madrid that they should take similar measures as the Italians.<sup>229</sup> Thus, these fascist countries, similar in political ideology to the national socialism of Nazi Germany, acted on their own unique and nationalistic form of fascism.

Radigales' sense of urgency and desperation was apparent in his letters to Spain. Complaints about Madrid's slow reaction time were rampant and expressed in a variety of ways:

"I beg Spain to give me instructions as quickly as possible"<sup>230</sup>

"The complete lack of instructions...I have not been answered which puts me in a difficult situation"<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 152.

<sup>228</sup> Paldiel, *Diplomat heroes of the Holocaust*, 209.

<sup>229</sup> Letter: May 6, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

These repetitive statements give a sense of the frustration Radigales felt at the lack of support provided by the Spanish government. Spain's inaction translated to Jews dying. At the same time, this communication gap allowed Radigales to use bureaucratic delays to his advantage. Remarkably, Radigales did not receive any clear instructions to stop him. This disconnect allowed Radigales' efforts to go above and beyond the call of bureaucratic duty. He went so far as to "solicit the legations of the transit countries to ask their governments for authorizations to endorse the passports of those repatriated" with Spain contributing in a very limited manner to the process.<sup>232</sup>

What's even more fascinating is the fact that the Germans were on board for this initiative and actually wanted the Sephardim out of Greece as quickly as possible. It is possible that the Germans simply wanted the Jews out, and if the Spanish or anybody else would take them, that would be okay. Radigales' efforts certainly paid off in this respect. However, it was Spain's government, not Germany, which opposed the repatriation plan. A letter from Madrid dated July 13, 1943 in response to a letter written by Germans on July 8, 1943 states, "the Spanish government, after studying the case of the Sephardim of Salonika that desire to come to Spain, has understood no procedure of expediting a collective passport in your favor and have given instructions in this sense to your representatives in Greece." In fact, Radigales described

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<sup>232</sup> Letter: June 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.



the Germans as “gracious collaborators” in facilitating repatriation.<sup>233</sup> In this case, Radigales’ language is important to consider.

Although Radigales wrote this letter to Madrid, it is very possible that the Germans could have seen it and he was trying to flatter them by using this terminology. In true diplomatic form, individuals rarely say what they mean but rather say what will sound good or will work to their advantage in accomplishing a certain goal. Here, it seems that Radigales is attempting to ingratiate himself to the Germans so that they will heed his requests regarding the Spanish Jews. This is just one of many examples of Spanish diplomats using different tones in different letters to finesse their arguments to suit their particular needs. But the fact remains that it was Spain, not Germany that prevented the Sephardim in Greece from finding asylum.

### **Sebastián Romero de Radigales’ Legacy**

Communications between Romero Radigales and the Spanish government offer a fascinating perspective on the job of “Spanish diplomat.” Radigales spoke directly with the Germans with a “seriousness that forced them to listen”<sup>234</sup> according to a testimony by a Sephardic Jew. Radigales refused to take Germany’s opinion that Spain was disinterested as his

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> “Hablaban a los alemanes con dureza y ellos tenían que escucharle,” Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 159.

personal defining stance. Instead he chose to act on his own accord and greatly impacted the fate of many Sephardim. This disinterest appears to be an accurate description of the Spanish government's stance. When Radigales noticed increasing German threats, he worked to aid the Jews even when officials in Spain had not given him orders to do so.<sup>235</sup>

Even with Madrid's ambiguous and non-committal behavior, Radigales was not disheartened and instead increased his efforts to help the Jews.<sup>236</sup> He clearly favored a policy of repatriation and worked to convince Spain to act accordingly.<sup>237</sup> Without assistance from Spain, Radigales continued to help the Jews, intervening with the German ambassador to attempt the release of 350 Greek Jews in Bergen-Belsen on March 24, 1944 (see figure 15).<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 250.

<sup>236</sup> Paldiel, *Diplomat heroes of the Holocaust*, 210.

<sup>237</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 252.

<sup>238</sup> Paldiel, *Diplomat heroes of the Holocaust*, 210.

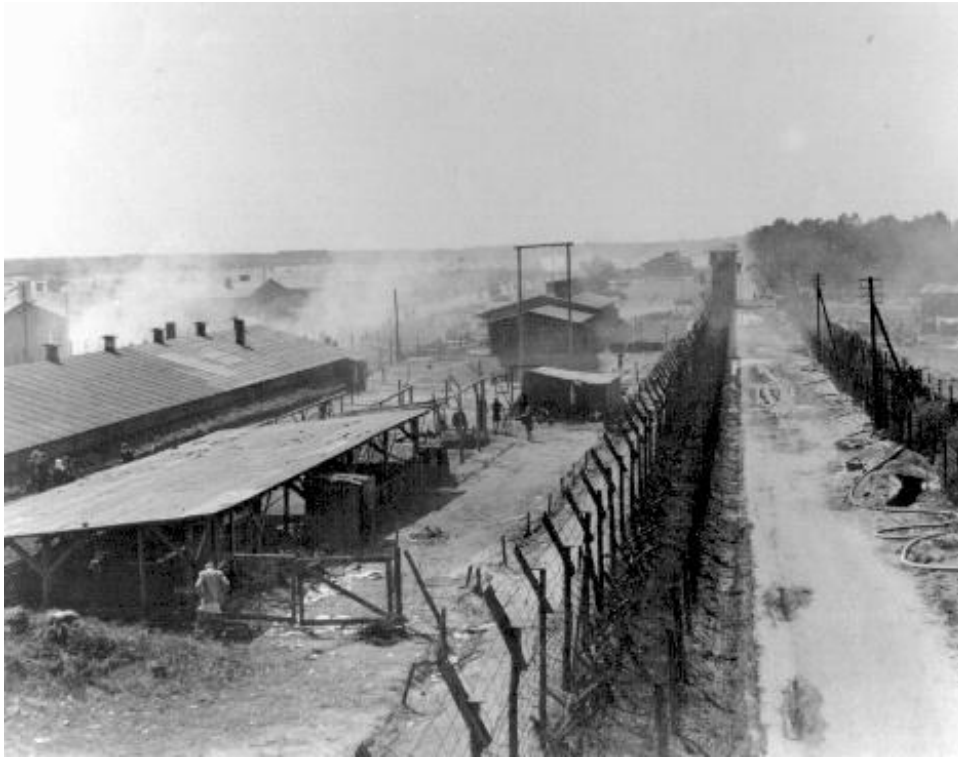


Figure 15: Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp.<sup>239</sup> *Source: [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)*

The fact that this effort was unsuccessful does not diminish the credit it deserves.

Radigales' efforts were also crucial in communicating to the Spanish government the seriousness of the Jews' situation. Only when the Spanish diplomats in both Berlin and Athens showed "the crude moral consequences through the detention of the Spanish Jews of Salonika and revealed

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<sup>239</sup> This is particularly noteworthy because Bergen-Belsen was a work camp rather than a death camp. Due to the nature of the camp of this, this event can be seen as a moderate move on the part of the Germans; the Germans may have been testing the water with the Spanish. If the Franco regime protested the imprisonment of their Sephardim, they could easily be extradited from the work camp. But if sending the Sephardim to Bergen-Belsen elicited no reaction by the Spanish, Germany could then send the Sephardim somewhere more permanent – to the death camps in the East. It is also possible that the Germans had hoped that the Spanish would repatriate Sephardim, because German transportation and camps could not cope with an influx of Sephardim.

that the German government was serious about their ultimatum” did Spain authorize repatriation.<sup>240</sup>

Radigales’ genuine sympathy for the Jewish cause did not go unnoticed. In the words of a grateful Spanish Jew interviewed by scholar Federico Ysart:

Mr. Romero has always been a father for us, a guide of safety, a prudent advisor, and when he has failed, a defender full of dignity and energy. With a bond never broken, he has received us at whatever hour of the day that we needed him and in those moments most critical for us, he has shown to all of us. The Sephardim of Greece will transmit to their descendants, this precious patrimony to narrate this tale of anguish, memory, and magnificent force realized by our ministry in Athens, Mr. Romero.<sup>241</sup>

A similar sentiment is echoed by Greek Sephardi Isaac Revah, recorded in Eduardo Martín de Pozuelo’s book:

All of us, my parents, my sister and I were able to embark to Palestine which was under a British mandate. And in 1948, we immigrated to France and moved to Paris where I could study, receive my doctorate in physics, and find work. I had a lot of luck and never tire of repeating it I will never forget all that is thanks to Sebastian Romero Radigales.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 278.

<sup>241</sup> El Dr. Romero ha sido siempre para nosotros un padre, una guía segura, un prudente consejero y, cuando ha hecho falta, un defensor lleno de dignidad y energía. Con una bondad nunca desmentida, nos ha recibido a cualquier hora del día o de la noche en que necesitábamos de su auxilio o consejo, y en estos momentos tan críticos para nosotros, nos ha prodigado a todos, hasta a los más humildes, con su incansable actividad, los tesoros de su bondad y de sus bien meditados consejos. Los sefarditas de Grecia transmitirán a sus descendientes, como patrimonio precioso al narrar esta época de angustia, el recuerdo del magnífico esfuerzo realizado por nuestro Ministro en Atenas, Sr. Romero: Ysart, *España y los judíos*, 97.

<sup>242</sup> “Seguía recordando Isaac Revah: “nosotros, mis padres, mi Hermana y yo, conseguimos embarcarnos para palestina cuando aquello estaba aun bajo mandato británico. Y en 1948 emigramos a Francia y nos instalamos en

Radigales managed to save 500-600 Sephardim and these individuals remained extremely grateful.<sup>243</sup> The Holocaust's death toll, already staggering, would have been even greater without the courageous work and personal risk of Sebastian Romero de Radigales and other brave individuals like him.

To this day, scholars continue to question why Spain's Consul General acted in such a kind and humanitarian way towards the Jews. Some say that his wife was Jewish, others that he had Jewish relatives; however, these ideas represent mere hypotheses.<sup>244</sup> No matter the reason, nearly all scholars agree that Radigales was a humanitarian who "actively took the side of his Jewish wards against the machinations of the Nazis."<sup>245</sup> For this reason, Radigales has received recognition by countries beyond Spain: he was, named an "individual meriting mention and praise"<sup>246</sup> by Yad Vashem<sup>247</sup> in Jerusalem.<sup>248</sup> Additionally, an Israeli postage company printed a

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París, donde he podido estudiar, doctorarme en física y encontrar trabajo. Tuve mucha suerte y no me canso de repetirlo. Nunca olvidare que todo fue gracias a Sebastián Romero Radigales": Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 159.

<sup>243</sup> Martín de Pozuelo. *El Franquismo*, 102.

<sup>244</sup> Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 91.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> "Not all individuals presented before the Righteous Among the Nations committee met all the criteria and some were denied the full Righteous title. Instead, some received letters of thanks and appreciation and some are still in the investigative stage. However, "the picture that emerges from the information already pulled of these diplomats is of persons who extended aid and succor in one form or another. It is therefore appropriate in this study of diplomat helpers to mention their names and their deeds": Paldiel, *Diplomat heroes of the Holocaust*, 201.

<sup>247</sup> As the Jewish people's living memorial to the Holocaust and as the world center for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust. Yad Vashem website, yadvashem.org.

<sup>248</sup> Paldiel, *Diplomat heroes of the Holocaust*, 209.

stamp honoring Radigales for his efforts during World War Two on behalf of the Sephardim (see figure 16).<sup>249</sup> Ultimately, Radigales used his distance from Spain to his advantage in asserting his diplomatic powers to help the Sephardim with little resistance from Franco. By taking certain liberties, as well as improvising and coming up with innovative repatriation plans, Radigales certainly deserves the award he received by Yad Vashem if not a more serious award such as being inducted as a member of the Righteous Among the Nations.<sup>250</sup>



Figure 16: Sebastián Romero de Radigales Honored on Israeli Postage Stamp.  
*Source:* [www.raoulwallenberg.net](http://www.raoulwallenberg.net).

<sup>249</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 252.

<sup>250</sup> In 1962, Yad Vashem established a commission to designate a “righteous public agency” to recognize non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust

## Chapter 5: A Continuation, Diplomacy at a Distance: Julio Palencia of Bulgaria<sup>251</sup>



Figure 17: Distance from Spain to Bulgaria, 2033.7 miles.

*Source:* googlemaps.com.

### Bulgaria During World War Two

In a similar fashion to Radigales in Greece, Spanish diplomats in Bulgaria also used their distance from Spain to their advantage in saving Spanish Jews (see figure 17). Bulgaria was initially a neutral country during World War Two until March 1, 1941, when the country joined

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<sup>251</sup> See appendix (pages 156) for corresponding timeline for this chapter.

the Axis Powers.<sup>252</sup> Along with this alliance with Germany came new anti-Semitic legislative measures, which greatly impacted the Spanish-Jewish community residing there. Shortly following the institution of these laws, the Germans offered an ultimatum in July of 1942; Jews who did not exit the country by September 1<sup>st</sup> would be subjected to the same poor conditions as the Bulgarian Jews.<sup>253</sup>

When Bulgaria annexed Macedonia on March 4, 1943, the Bulgarian government arrested all Jews in these districts and sent them to detention camps. The Bulgarians also turned over Jews in the occupied areas of Greece and Yugoslavia. From this point onward, anti-Jewish legislation increased in harshness. Interestingly, however, the Bulgarians did not end up shipping their own Jews away due to intervention by the King, Dimitar Peshev, as well as Bulgarian church officials and ordinary citizens.<sup>254</sup> Peshev wrote, “I had the impression that the minister was confused and nervous, and although the full information in my possession contradicted his assertion that nothing new and unusual against the Jews was about to happen...For the moment that gave me satisfaction—after all the immediate goal of our initiative was to prevent these

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<sup>252</sup> When the Second World War broke out, Bulgaria declared its neutrality. By 1941, however, Hitler needed Bulgaria to be compliant so that he could march his troops through Bulgaria en route to offensives against both Yugoslavia and Greece. Bulgaria agreed and subsequently gained some territorial gains in Yugoslavia and Greece by joining with Hitler.

<sup>253</sup> Ysart, *España y los judíos*, 121.

<sup>254</sup> Michael Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler's grasp: the heroic rescue of Bulgaria's Jews* (Holbrook, MA: Adams Media, 1998), 123.



people to be sent out of Bulgaria.”<sup>255</sup> Parliament members insisted that the deportation of the Jews be cancelled immediately and would not leave Prime Minister Petur Gabrovski’s<sup>256</sup> office until their demands were satisfied.<sup>257</sup> The Nazis eventually backed down after witnessing this show of Bulgarian solidarity on behalf of the Jews. As a result, Bulgaria managed to save its entire Jewish population, numbering 48,000, during World War Two.<sup>258</sup>

Despite this remarkable fact, Bulgaria still remained a country with strong anti-Jewish legislation, particularly in the beginning years of the war. During this time, the Spanish minister in Sofia, Julio Palencia, stepped in to the extreme benefit to the Sephardim. In response to Germany’s 1942 ultimatum, Palencia requested that the German legation grant transit visas for occupied countries to allow Spanish subjects to come to Spain.<sup>259</sup> Palencia, who had established contact with the Sephardic community of Bulgaria prior to these measures, took the approach that “in Spain citizens of different categories classified for ethnic or religious reasons do not exist”<sup>260</sup> and considered the Sephardim to have special ties to Spain.<sup>261</sup> The Sephardic

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> A Bulgarian politician who briefly served as Prime Minister during the Second World War and began his political career as a Nazi, forming his own movement the Ratniks of the Advancement of the Bulgarian National Spirit. The group was strongly Anti-Semitic and was said to have links to Nazi Germany.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> <http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/about/09/balkans.asp>.

<sup>259</sup> Ysart, *España y los judíos*, 121.

<sup>260</sup> La condición de raza o de religión de estas personas no cuenta en nuestra Legislación nacional.

<sup>261</sup> Ysart, *España y los judíos*, 129.

community of Bulgaria was, in fact, one of the oldest and most prosperous in Europe; they had a beautiful temple in the middle of the city and maintained strong ties with their Spanish roots.<sup>262</sup>

### **Spanish Consul in Bulgaria**

Julio Palencia dedicated his efforts to protecting this community. Initially, the collaborationist Bulgarian Prime Minister, Bogdan Filov, believed Palencia to be Pro-Nazi because he was Franco's representative. He confided in Palencia secret German orders to begin the deportations of Bulgarian Jews, including the Sephardim.<sup>263</sup> After this experience, Palencia made his pro-Sephardic attitude explicit, going so far as threatening the "precious collaboration" and "good relations" that existed between Germany and Spain if the Germans did not instruct the Bulgarians to treat the Sephardim properly (see figure 18).<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 136.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ysart, *España y los judíos*, 129.



Figure 18: Spanish Diplomat Julio Palencia. *Source:* [www.raoulwallenberg.net](http://www.raoulwallenberg.net).

Following the implementation of these laws, Palencia deeply desired to convey to Spain the full implications of the new anti-Semitic laws in Bulgaria. In June of 1942, he describes measures taken against the Jews, such as the fact that they were prohibited from saluting the Bulgarian flag and owning businesses. More importantly, he warns that not only will such campaigns continue, but also that new laws promulgated will be even more severe.<sup>265</sup>

Into the month of July, he continued to update Madrid about the specific circumstances pertinent to the Sephardim and describes the sense of panic and nervousness within the Spanish colony. This clearly speaks to his sense of sympathy towards the Jewish community.<sup>266</sup> He conveyed to Madrid that he didn't have the "necessity of power in order to describe the panic

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<sup>265</sup> Letter: June 8, 1942, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>266</sup> Letter: July 24, 1942, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

and nervousness and hysteria of the Israelite Spaniards” which he is certain Spain is already aware of due to the legation’s inundation “with demands for secondary help and protection, complaints, lamentations, and sobs.”<sup>267</sup>

In 1943, Palencia increased his requests to the Spanish government to protect the Sephardim. While the Bulgarians ultimately spared their Jews from deportation, the looming fear of deportation was real and Palencia never felt safe or confident that his Sephardim would not be shipped off to the East. A letter written to Madrid on March 17, 1943, Palencia discusses the anti-Semitic politics in Bulgaria and explains that the Bulgarians’ actions represent a “phenomenon” in which Bulgaria tried to compensate in its relations with Germany through its treatment of the Jews since Bulgaria did not wish to participate in the actual war.<sup>268</sup> Palencia blames Bulgaria’s more extreme measures against the Jews as a Bulgarian fervor for Hitler’s “politics of destruction” and extermination of what the Fuhrer considers a “bad race” instead of fighting against the Soviet Union for Germany.<sup>269</sup> These measures, according to Palencia, resulted in “intense panic” once more in the Spanish colony.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Letter: May 27, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>268</sup> Letter: March, 17, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Letter: March 25, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

Besides this thoughtful interpretation of the events taking place in Bulgaria, Palencia describes how the Spanish consul protested the German actions taken against the Jews “*without distinction of nationality.*” This idea is particularly poignant because Palencia defended all Jews, not just the Sephardim. This defense is unique in that most Spanish diplomats who protected the Sephardim did so on the basis that Spanish Jews were superior to Ashkenazi Jews due to their Spanish roots. It is equally likely that it was less that the Sephardim were superior so much as they had more jurisdiction over the treatment of Spanish nationals and could do more to help. It is particularly doubtful that those who risked their lives to help Jews cared about ethnic distinctions. Rather, this seems to be more of a rationalization and defense of Radigales’ actions to help him save more people. These Spanish diplomats used an argument that would appeal to fascist leanings and nationalist sensibilities while also protesting how the Germans treated Jews of Spanish nationality the same as Jews of other nationalities.

Additionally, while other diplomats may not have truly believed in such racial hierarchies, they had jurisdiction over the Sephardic rather than Ashkenazim Jews and thus only had it in their power to help the Spanish Jews. Therefore, this distinction may have only been made to appease the Germans and relate to their racial discourses and may be a testament to the sad reality that there was nothing else these diplomats could do for Jews who were not Sephardic.

Besides this, Palencia also took direct action to help the Sephardim. For instance, he obtained immunity for 110 Spaniards protected by papers that “produced inevitable effects for those who bore the Spanish name, for without being Spanish, they would not be saved.”<sup>271</sup> It appears that this idea represents more of a question of nationality than Sephardic “superiority.” Palencia also succeeded in obtaining cash for the Sephardim from their frozen deposits and his overall pro-Jewish stance earned him the nickname “the well-known friend of the Jews” in German correspondence.<sup>272</sup>

In another heroic episode, instead of waiting for a response from Madrid, Palencia visited the most important Nazi representative in Bulgaria, Adolf Heinz Beckele, and announced that Spain was prepared to proceed with the repatriation of all Jews in Bulgaria.<sup>273</sup> While this was not actually the case, the meeting resulted in a tense conversation. Later on, a German official described Palencia’s actions in Bulgaria via telegram, saying “he expressed disgust at the expulsion of the Jews of Sofia and has asked to intervene in favor of his friends, the Bulgarian Jews, which of course I have rejected.”<sup>274</sup> Despite this sort of backlash, Palencia’s firmness did

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<sup>271</sup> Ysart, *España y los judíos*, 132.

<sup>272</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 166.

<sup>273</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 88.

<sup>274</sup> “Se declara disgustado por la expulsión de los judíos de Sofia y ha pedido intervenir a favor de sus amigos judíos búlgaros, lo cual, por supuesto, he rechazado”: Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 138.

achieve a certain level of success and successfully defended the interests of numerous Bulgarian Sephardic families.<sup>275</sup>

### **Lack of Spanish Commitment**

It is apparent that as with the case of Greece, Franco's regime failed to make its instructions either timely or explicit. Palencia emphasizes this by underlining the following sentence at the end of his letter on March of 1943:

I would be very pleased with the V.E.<sup>276</sup> if it could communicate with me by telegram how it decides to proceed, keep in mind that at the end of the next month of April start the deportations of Jewish residents in Bulgaria and if by this date Spain hasn't decided anything in particular, I can't do anything to help and protect our Spanish subjects.

This sentiment is clearly emphasized in multiple letters. By remaining non-committal, Franco allowed Jews to be saved by actions taken by his diplomats and yet if the Nazis became angered he could say that he never gave an order for these actions. In the same vein, he could take credit if the allies approved. Clearly then, a fine line existed in navigating the role of bureaucrat and the government at large. A bureaucrat could do a lot, but would not be taken seriously enough by the

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<sup>275</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 138.

<sup>276</sup> I am not sure what V.E. stands for but it is obviously a form of a proper greeting for a diplomat to address the Spanish regime.

German authorities to exercise complete enough authority to save the Jews. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the Spanish government could revoke the power of these diplomats.

Despite all of the difficulties Palencia encountered, he continued to put his best efforts forward and his actions went beyond the typical work of a diplomat. Palencia openly discussed with Madrid the “one ardent aspiration” of the Spanish Jews-to leave Bulgaria and find a more “humane and hospitable” land.<sup>277</sup> Palencia made the role of Spain very clear in this matter; the only way for the Spanish Jews to reach America or Latin America was to “get on a boat from a Spanish port.”<sup>278</sup> In this chain of logic follows the fact that these Jews needed visas to come to Spain. Palencia is equally candid throughout his correspondence about the “formalities of administrative origin” that issuing visas requires.<sup>279</sup> As a result of such delayed responses by the Spanish government and the urgency of the circumstances, Palencia solicited Madrid to grant him a “certain elasticity in the concession of visas *not important of their nationality or condition*.”<sup>280</sup> In this case, it appears that Palencia was trying to get visas for non-Spanish Jews and pushing the bounds of diplomatic jurisdiction.

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<sup>277</sup> Letter: September 13, 1942, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.



## Granting Visas

In order to justify getting visas for Spanish Jews, Palencia argues that the protection of the Sephardim was inscribed in a historical context through Spanish laws, such as the Primo de Rivera law as discussed previously. But Spanish protection of Ashkenazi Jews held no such historical precedent. However, Palencia also elevates the Spanish Jews in particular, saying “in Spain they were born the Ezras and Averos<sup>281</sup>...and in the Middle Ages they were the unique center of civilization and culture.”<sup>282</sup> This idea of Spanish exceptionality and Spain’s historical memory of them is not unique to Palencia. But in this case, it seems that appealing to nationalism is a tactful means of legitimizing his actions towards the Jews.

Palencia appears to be exploiting the existence of national exceptionalize to help more Jews. He goes on to argue in his letter that the Spanish government should communicate to Berlin that the Spanish Jews “cannot be considered as herds destined to death” because to be Spanish is to be “something very superior to the incidents and fluctuations of German politics.”

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<sup>281</sup> Ironically, the name “Franco” is considered a Jewish name. Various historians have questioned whether Francisco Franco had Jewish blood or was secretly a *converso* and used his personal ties to Judaism as a reason for his aid to the Sephardim. However, this viewpoint has been widely discredited for it has never been substantiated and he may bare a quasi-Jewish name without being very Jewish due to the high rate of intermingling among Spaniards of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds throughout history.

<sup>282</sup> Letter: March 17, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>283</sup> In this way, a Spanish nationalist argues against German Nazism, two political ideologies that have often been lumped together as the same.

Palencia also invokes policies of international law to defend his viewpoint on numerous occasions. In just one of these, on September 8, 1943, he wrote to Spain: “I dare to insinuate to Spain that ...from the point of view of international law, to submit to its foreign subjects a law that of exception represents a political tendency that in our homeland doesn’t have for a moment existence nor reality one bit.” He goes so far as to say that the “the Bulgarians will be judged at the end of the war” and “will have to pay for it in time.”<sup>284</sup> He expresses his personal revulsion at Bulgaria’s treatment of the Jews, adding “it would make me a liar to say that in the full twentieth century there can be such applications by a nation that says it is civilized.”<sup>285</sup>

Additionally, Palencia argues not only that the “the Spanish Jews do not deserve this treatment” but also that “Spain is obligated to protect them.”<sup>286</sup> He tells Madrid that it would be “highly convenient” if Spain would indicate to Germany that “Spain doesn’t permit and will never permit, under any pretext, to have a child of theirs treated worse than an African Slave resigned to death.”<sup>287</sup> In this case, it is unclear whether Palencia actually thinks so little of

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Letter: May 27, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>286</sup> Letter: March 17, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

<sup>287</sup> Letter: May 27, 1943, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archival Research.

Africans, or if he is exploiting racist ideas to his Jews' advantage. It seems that Palencia may be exploiting others' ideas of racial superiority, particularly the conception of racial superiority held by the Germans, to use German terms and logic as a rhetorical strategy to justify and manipulate his exploitation.

### **Adoption**

Even more remarkable was Palencia's adoption of Sephardic Jew and Bulgarian citizen Leon Arie's family. Leon was executed for raising the price of perfume he sold by a few pennies, and Palencia came to the aid of his wife and children.<sup>288</sup> Palencia acted through the Bulgarian courts to adopt Arie's widow, Raquel Behar, and his two adolescent children, Cludy and Rene.<sup>289</sup> Without consulting anyone, he surprised his diplomatic colleagues when he freed the two individuals, provided them with diplomatic passports, and housed them in his own legation.<sup>290</sup>

The Bulgarian legation transmitted numerous complaints to the Spanish Ministry, which foreign minister Jordana then expressed to Palencia himself.<sup>291</sup> Palencia responded immediately, explaining,

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<sup>288</sup> Avni, *Spain, The Jews, and Franco*, 166.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 87.

<sup>291</sup> Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 138.

[B]y following the advice of renowned attorneys, one of who is the ex minister of justice, I have adopted two children—seventeen and nineteen years old—children of the Sephardic Arie, condemned to death and whose sentence has been considered a general injustice and due entirely to his Jewish origin. As a result, it is inadmissible to say that the adoption on my part of these two minors belonging to a race the Bulgarian government has tried to make disappear from the country is an incorrect action.<sup>292</sup>

In its reply, the Spanish ministry skirted the humanitarian issue at hand and instead focused on Palencia's role as credible representative of Spain in Bulgaria and advised him to take actions that would not be opposed by the Bulgarian government.<sup>293</sup>

### **Julio Palencia's Fate**

In the end, Palencia's actions proved dangerous to his own life. The Spanish Sephardim in Bulgaria adored Palencia and viewed *Don Julio* ("Mr. Julio"), as they called him, as their only hope. The Nazis, however, saw in him a fanatic anti-German.<sup>294</sup> He was finally named *persona non grata*,<sup>295</sup> forced to leave Bulgaria and return to Madrid.<sup>296</sup> Palencia's actions represent a

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<sup>292</sup> Tras seguir los consejos de los renombrados abogados, uno de ellos un ex ministro de justicia, he adoptado a dos niños de 17 y 19 años, hijos del sefardí Arie, condenado a muerte y cuya sentencia ha sido considerada en general injusta y debida enteramente a su origen judío. Por tanto, es inadmisibile decir que la adopción por mi parte de dos menores que pertenecen a una raza que el gobierno búlgaro dese hacer desaparecer del país es una acción incorrecta: Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 138.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> An unwelcome or undesirable person.

<sup>296</sup> <http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/saviors/diplomats/spanish/diplomats-52/julio-palencia/>.

crescendo of activity, far beyond the scope of his diplomatic duties, and enabled only by the diplomatic apparatus and his distance from Spain. But his violations also reveal where the bounds of diplomatic oversight are finally inviolable. A certain level of personal involvement, some overly sympathetic speeches: these the Spanish government could overlook, but not his adoption of a Jewish family. With this action he moved far past the point of impunity.

Palencia and his adopted children left Sofia quickly and without saying good-bye to anyone, understanding the precarious situation the furious German delegation put them in. The Nazis told all of their delegations about this event and put them on alert, making Palencia and his adopted children “invalid” by German order.<sup>297</sup> With the Gestapo “on his heels,”<sup>298</sup> Palencia arrived in Madrid with his new children while Rachel Behar escaped to Romania, where she was protected as a Spanish national by the Turkish embassy.<sup>299</sup> In the end, young Rene Arie Palencia died in a bombing in 1945.<sup>300</sup> Cludy, after some time in Romania, escaped further instances of anti-Semitism and relocated permanently to Argentina until her death in 1982.<sup>301</sup> Until all of their deaths, the entire Arie family never ceased publically proclaiming their deep love and

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<sup>297</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 94.

<sup>298</sup> Literalmente en los talones

<sup>299</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 96.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

gratitude for Julio Palencia.<sup>302</sup> Palencia himself died on March 25, 1952 at sixty-eight years old.<sup>303</sup> According to scholar Martín de Pozuelo, “a punishment that still lasts is that his ministry is only remembered one time in the year 2000 and in December of 2011 he still has not been entered in the part of foreign affairs that speaks of its heroes.”<sup>304</sup> Considering all that Palencia did for the Sephardim of Bulgaria, it is astonishing that he has received such little recognition for his actions.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, the work of both Radigales in Greece and Palencia in Bulgaria demonstrate the bounds of power within Franco’s loose bureaucratic system and how geographical distance created greater opportunity for diplomatic insubordination. The actions of these diplomats, like the work of Bernardo Rolland in Paris, represent systematic efforts in different locations to help the Sephardim: a group of Spaniards with whom these diplomats felt personal and historical ties to.

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<sup>302</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 97.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> “Un castigo que debe durar todavía ya que en su ministerio solo le recordaron una vez en el año 2000 y en diciembre de 2011 todavía no había ninguna entrada en la web de asuntos exteriores que hablase de sus héroes”: Martín de Pozuelo. *El Franquismo*, 97.

## **Conclusion: “Whosoever saves a single life saves an entire universe”**

(Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5)

### **Recognizing Spanish Diplomatic Heroism**

Spain’s fascinating historical relations with the Sephardim coupled with diplomatic aid, as described in France, Greece, and Bulgaria during World War Two create a profoundly ironic paradigm. The complexities of the Franco regime’s alliances and political ideology make it virtually impossible to parse out the actual sentiments of Spain as a nation towards the Sephardim. Attempts by much of the literature on this subject to paint Spain as either “good” or “bad” is far too simplistic. Franco’s regime engaged with many other countries, trying to find the middle ground and not anger anyone too much in the process. In desperate times, Franco’s regime acted mostly out of self-interest as most other countries in its situation presumably would have done. The United States, for instance, also chose to act in its own self-interest: Roosevelt chose to concentrate on the war effort rather than bomb the railroads to Auschwitz or provide additional efforts towards halting the Holocaust.

However, due to the importance of self-interest in this matter it is crucial to consider the Spanish diplomats apart from the overall regime, for they based their actions on humanitarian motives. Besides the Spanish diplomats discussed in this paper, countless others have been

named as important figures in saving Jews. These figures include Casa Rojas in Romania, Frederico Olivan in Vienna, Giorgio Perlesca, J. Rives Childs, and most famously Angel Sanz Briz<sup>305</sup> in Hungary.

The question of individual versus systematic efforts on behalf of the Jews is something that distinguishes Spanish diplomats from diplomats of other countries in this era. Explanations for this activity stem from both an understanding of the importance of the Sephardim to Spain's nationalistic self-definition, and from an awareness of the context in which Spanish diplomats operated: at a distance from Franco's central government both literally and figuratively.

Ultimately, the underlying irony – the very fact that Spanish diplomats aided Jews and yet Israeli-Spanish diplomatic relations prevented these very diplomats from being recognized – contributes to the overall irony that marks much of Spanish history.

### **Rescued and Rescuers**

Looking back, Spanish citizenship was a godsend for many Spanish Jews, since many Spanish diplomats used the citizenship granted to the Sephardim in 1924 to save them from the perils of the Nazi Holocaust. Ultimately, the Spanish state's history of shameful mistreatment of

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<sup>305</sup> Consul general in Hungary who has been recognized by Yad Vashem's "righteous among the nations" in 1965 for issuing transit visas for over 1500 Jews.



the Sephardim might be one plausible explanation for the extensive aid Spanish diplomats provided for the Spanish Jews, whom they defended as they would regular Spanish citizens. These consuls drew upon the 1924 Primo de Rivera law to substantiate their claims of protecting “citizens” and their posts pre-dated Franco’s reign, which to some extent allowed them to act independently of his regime. In this way, many of these Spanish diplomats were not inherently part and parcel of the Franco regime and therefore did not share their leader’s ambivalent attitude and opportunistic approach. Instead, they maintained a consistent policy and they chose to help the Sephardim.

The reasons *why* these Spanish diplomats acted in favor of the Jews is understudied in the current historiography and is difficult to explain fully. The workings of the bureaucratic system differed in the cases of Greece and Bulgaria, in comparison to France. The first two countries were located farther away from Spain, so Spanish diplomats there were afforded more freedoms to act independently of the Franco regime. In France, a country bordering Spain, the Franco regime exercised tighter control over its diplomats, although some were still able to act contrary to the instructions they were given. In both the case of diplomacy at a distance from Spain and on the Spanish-French border, many aspects of bureaucratic structure help to explain why Spanish diplomats helped the Jews.

It is also possible that the Spanish diplomats connected with the Sephardim on an even deeper level regarding the question of identity. Diplomats often have a very strong identity connection with each other. They often have more in common with each other as diplomats than with other “French” or “Spanish” citizens. This distinction sets diplomats as a “nation apart,” or a group of individuals whose chosen profession explicitly requires them to wander the world. Perhaps this contributes to a fundamental connection with Jews. Throughout history Jews have been seen as a “nation apart” or a “nation within a nation.” They have had ties to another, foreign homeland—namely Israel. Both diplomats and Jews maintain a cultural connection to their new home but are still somehow “others” in an intangible sense. It is possible that this similar identity and emphasis on wandering allowed these particular Spanish diplomats to feel a certain sense of empathy towards the Sephardim. **They were culturally the closest to the diplomats wherever they arrived.** Such an ephemeral connection may explain some of their extraordinarily humanitarian actions, sometimes undertaken at personal risk.

The actions taken by Spanish diplomats abroad during World War Two are directly connected to the independence of the Spanish diplomatic corps from Franco. It is obvious that Franco did not establish a clear agenda for his diplomats or an institutionalized training system prior to 1942. Additionally, these diplomats did not have the confidence of the Franco regime, and it appears that Franco was cognizant of the fact that his diplomats acted however they saw

fit. Some of these diplomats may have actively chosen to work in opposition to the Franco regime because of their political differences while others may have worked against their government purely because they were doing what they thought was morally right.

Overall, it is clear that the Spanish Civil War had a profound impact on the Spanish diplomatic corps. The 1942 establishment of the institutionalized training system of the diplomatic corps was Franco's attempt to correct this problem and create a ranking of diplomats that was an extension of his regime with the same ideological leanings.

These suggestions are possible answers to the historical puzzle of Spanish help to Jewish refugees in World War Two. Beyond providing ways to comprehend an important and relatively unacknowledged aspect of Holocaust history, this work calls attention to the importance of recognizing contingency and competing interests in historiography. Additionally, it brings to light questions of recognition and why certain people are remembered while others aren't.

Part of the reason for Yad Vashem's lack of recognition for these diplomats can be attributed to the lens of historiography and the questions of why and how Spain's role was commemorated in the way it was. On one hand, in the wake of World War Two, Spain became an isolated country, almost a pariah, to much of the Western world. The Western democracies associated Spain with the frightening "f" word, fascism, a political ideology shared by Hitler and his followers, allies, and supporters who started World War Two. Franco, in the eyes of Western

democracy, Spain was Hitler's former ally, which could therefore not be trusted. On the other hand, Spain was quick to overstate the extent of its aid to the Jews through an extensive propaganda campaign in an effort to rewrite Spain's war record for the rest of the world. The creation of this myth, the exaggerated and false impression of Spain's sense of humanitarian action, was propagated by the spread of pamphlets and packets. For instance, one called *España y los judíos*<sup>306</sup> intended to show the "truth" about Spain's role during the Holocaust.<sup>307</sup>

Additionally, Spain attempted to cultivate some important Jewish leaders and having meetings with the World Jewish Congress.<sup>308</sup> So by exaggerating claims plus bearing the stigma of fascism, the Spanish lost credibility. Despite the fact that Spain could have undoubtedly saved many more Jews, Spain hoped to rewrite its history to "show the exemplar politics of Franco to the democratic world."<sup>309</sup> According to Martínez Reverte in the Madrileño newspaper *El País* article *La lista de Franco para el Holocausto* published in 2010, "at the end of World War Two, Franco's regime tried with relative success to confuse the world's public opinion with the fable that he had contributed to the salvation of thousands of Jews from the eager Nazi

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<sup>306</sup> "Spain and the Jews"

<sup>307</sup> Rein. *Shadow of the Holocaust*, 38.

<sup>308</sup> The World Jewish Congress (WJC) was founded in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1936 as an international federation of Jewish communities and organizations. Its main purpose is to act as "the diplomatic arm of the Jewish people." Membership in the WJC is open to all representative Jewish communities regardless of the social, political or economic ideology of their host country. The official headquarters are in New York City.

<sup>309</sup> Rother, *Franco y el Holocausto*, 410.

exterminators.”<sup>310</sup> This effort was largely unsuccessful due to the fact that many people were critical of diplomats’ actual efforts because they are now seen as tainted or indistinguishable from this blatant propaganda. Regardless, the Israeli former Prime Minister Golda Meir<sup>311</sup> once said to the Spanish magazine *Epoca* that Israel was appreciative of “the humanitarian attitude taken by Spain during the Hitler era, when it gave aid and protection to any victims of Nazism.”<sup>312</sup>

Despite this statement by Golda Meir, according to Diego Carcedo, the lack of public knowledge about the actions taken by Spanish officials in Budapest and the lack of diplomatic relations between Spain and Hungary and Spain and Israel “impeded those who received in their lifetime some sort of recognition and homages that they later received; he [Ángel Sanz Briz] was named “Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem.”<sup>313</sup> Thus, it appears that this distortion of history contributed to Israel’s view of Spain and Yad Vashem’s slow pace at recognizing Spanish individuals and diplomats’ efforts during World War Two. At the same time, however,

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<sup>310</sup> “Al final de la II Guerra Mundial, el régimen de Franco intentó con relativo éxito confundir a la opinión pública mundial con la fábula de que había contribuido a la salvación de miles de judíos del afán exterminador nazi”: Jorge Martínez Reverte, “*La lista de Franco para el Holocausto*” (Madrid: El País), 20-06-2010.

<sup>311</sup> The fourth Prime Minister of Israel on March 17, 1969.

<sup>312</sup> Tremlett, “*General Franco gave list of Spanish Jews to the Nazis.*”

<sup>313</sup> “El desconocimiento publico de su actuación en Budapest y la ausencia durante muchos años de relaciones entre España y Hungría y España e Israel impidió que recibiese en vida alguno de los reconocimientos y homenajes que mas tarde le llevaron; fue declarado justo entre las naciones por el Yad Vashem”: Carcedo, *Entre bestias y héroes*, 210.

Spain is also guilty of revisionism. The official history that many Spaniards learned in college for the period of 1939 until Franco's death in 1975 was skewed by historians to include the pro-Semitic and enlightened "salvation" that Spain provided to the Jews during World War Two.<sup>314</sup> These propagandistic "lies" were created by the destruction of documents that proved that Spain collaborated with the Nazis, and also by "historical myopia" in which Franco changed the facts regarding Spanish intervention taken by diplomatic intervention *against* the orders of the dictator himself.<sup>315</sup>

### **Spain and Israel's Relations Post-World War Two**

Spain's revisionism in conjunction with modern diplomatic conflicts between Israel and Spain are probably the two main causes of the lack of Spanish diplomatic recognition. Perhaps the stage for these problems was set from the very inception of the state of Israel, when telegrams announcing its establishment were specifically not sent to Spain (along with Germany and Arab nations).<sup>316</sup> In fact, Spain was the last European country to recognize the state of Israel and went through an extended process of normalization, interchange of political visits, and intensification of cultural, historical, and scientific relations before official recognition

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<sup>314</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 52.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>316</sup> Rein, *Shadow of the Holocaust*, 9.

occurred.<sup>317</sup> Not until January 17, 1986 did diplomatic ties between Madrid and Jerusalem become official, restoring the historical link between Spain and the Jews.<sup>318</sup>

In the early argument about recognizing the Spanish government, Israeli diplomatic officials weighed two principles, discussion of which may clarify the lack of recognition that came from the Israeli side. The first was Spain's treatment of the Jews. According to Shlomo Kedar, First Secretary in Israel's Paris embassy,

The year 1492 indeed remains a shameful blot on the pages of Spanish history, but at the same time it does not seem to me good political sense to nurse a grudge forever. If Israel wanted to maintain relations only with those states, which, throughout their histories, had never persecuted Jews, I doubt that any could be found, except perhaps those where Jews have never lived.<sup>319</sup>

Kedar bolstered his argument by recalling some individual Spaniards' assistance in saving Jews during the war.<sup>320</sup> Kedar also considered the second principle: that Spain should not be recognized by Israel due to the nature of Franco's regime. In Kedar's view, as personally repellent as an absolutist regime might be to him, "it is an internal matter in every state to establish the regime it wants."<sup>321</sup> Thus, it is important to acknowledge that not all Spaniards wanted the Franco regime in Spain in the first place as it only came to power after a brutal civil

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<sup>317</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 129.

<sup>318</sup> Rein, *Shadow of the Holocaust*, 1.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

war. Ultimately, Kedar concluded that Israel should recognize Spain, but in 1950, when this debate was still in its infancy, such reasoning was powerless to change policy. Only in succeeding years did the thinking in Israel's Foreign Ministry change subtly, as "members of the lower echelons of diplomacy—from secretaries and envoys to ambassadors and division heads—began to exert pressure on the Ministry's senior officials."<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.



Israel's ambassador to the U.N., Abba Eban<sup>323</sup> overtly detailed the reasons for Israel's hostility towards Spain and why Israel was against Spain's admittance to the U.N. in May of 1949, saying that "the United Nations arose out of the sufferings of a martyred generation...we do not for a moment assert that the Spanish regime had any direct part in that policy of extermination; but we do assert that it was an active and sympathetic ally of the regime which was so responsible and thus contributed to the effectiveness of the alliance as a whole."<sup>324</sup> This stance would serve as the model for Israel's attitude towards Spain for many years to come. At the same time, it appears that **Spain wanted to relieve itself from this legacy but without having to recognize Israel.**

Leading up to the vote regarding Spain's admittance to the U.N., Israel received numerous telegrams from Sephardic Jewish communities from around the world and Jewish communities in Spanish Morocco requesting that Israel vote in favor of Franco's regime.<sup>325</sup> These appeals were popular between the years 1949-1959, even without the pending vote, whereby Sephardic communities continuously called for a change in Israel's policy towards Madrid. Overall, the Spanish ministry was very pleased by the devotion and sense of patriotism

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<sup>323</sup> Israeli diplomat and politician who served as the Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister, Education Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and ambassador to the United States and to the United Nation.

<sup>324</sup> Rein, *Shadow of the Holocaust*, 35.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.,33.

shown by the Sephardim.<sup>326</sup> Perhaps however, Israel categorically rejected these appeals and voted against Spain joining the U.N.<sup>327</sup> Allegedly, Franco felt personally offended by Israel's "no" vote and by the fact that Israel associated him with Hitler.<sup>328</sup> In fact, many Jews within Spain feared that Israel's vote would result in Franco's hostile retaliation against them, but these fears proved unfounded due to Spain's obsession with its international image.<sup>329</sup> Thus, the main impact of Israel's vote against Spain was the prevailing attitude in Spain that Israel had returned Spain's help to the Jews with ingratitude.<sup>330</sup>

It was not until Franco's death in 1975 that a change in Israeli-Spanish relations became possible; diplomatic relations were officially established in 1986.<sup>331</sup> In 1998, the Institute of Cervantes was inaugurated in Tel Aviv and in a crowning moment, Spanish King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofía paid homage to the victims of the Holocaust on a November 8, 1993 visit to Yad Vashem.<sup>332</sup> This rapprochement ultimately resulted in increased recognition for the humanitarian work of Spanish diplomats during the Holocaust. Today, while Spanish diplomats still lack popular recognition and are not household names in the way that saviors of other

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<sup>326</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>332</sup> Martín de Pozuelo, *El Franquismo*, 129.

nationalities are, their role is slowly but surely gaining recognition many years after the Holocaust. As recently as December 17, 2010, Spain became a member of the Task Force of International Cooperation for Education, Memory and Investigation of the Holocaust, known for decades as the International Task Force.

The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research is an “intergovernmental body whose purpose is to place political and social leaders' support behind the need for Holocaust education, remembrance, and research both nationally and internationally.”<sup>333</sup> Their mission is to “remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us, and reaffirm humanity's common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice.”<sup>334</sup> In Spain, this group works to name those Spanish individuals who helped Jews escape the Holocaust, with the underlying objective “to raise testimony and recuperate part of the collective historical memory.”<sup>335</sup>

### **Modern Day Reconciliation?**

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<sup>333</sup> <http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/about-the-itf.html>

<sup>334</sup> <http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/about-the-itf.html>: Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust.

<sup>335</sup> “El objetivo: recabar su testimonio y recuperar parte de la memoria histórica colectiva”: Duva, Jesús, “El Holocausto pasó por España” (Madrid: El País), 28-06-2011.

This complex modern day relationship between Israel and Spain has not had a negative impact on Spanish-Sephardic relationships. Recently, Spain extended citizenship to Jews of Sephardic descent. According to *New York Times* article “Citizenship Process Eased for Sephardic Jews” dated November 22, 2012 by Raphael Minder,

Spain is now granting citizenship automatically without any residency requirement to those who can demonstrate descent from those Jews expelled from Spain more than 500 years ago....This reform will affect those who are able to prove their Sephardic condition, whether it is via surnames, language, descendants or links to Spanish culture and Spanish customs.

Again, this preference to Jews may be described as a past remedy for injustice since it appears to be atonement for a shameful past. This citizenship is not granted to just *any* Jews, only Jews of Spanish heritage. However it is equally possible that this policy has self-serving motives. In this case, this extension of citizenship may possibly be linked to Spain’s severe economic recession, because they hope that the Sephardim returning to Spain could help the economy. It is additionally peculiar because Spain’s expelled Muslims do not have a "right to return" to Spain.

However, an article titled “A Tepid ‘Welcome Back’ for Spanish Jews” published in *The New York Times* on December 8, 2012, disputes the legitimacy of this “remedy.” Doreen Caravjal, the author of this piece, and herself a descendent of a Jew of clandestine Sephardic identity, argues that the improved process of nationalization for Sephardic Jews is more complicated than it initially appears. According to this article, “Spain’s foreign minister José

Manuel García-Margallo sought to address his nation's painful legacy when he revealed the reforms, declaring it was time 'to recover Spain's silenced memory.'<sup>336</sup> While some Sephardic communities, such as the Federation of Sephardic Jews in Argentina, were very pleased by Spain's new legislation, others, such as Genie Milgrom, who is president of the Jewish Genealogical Association, have no interest in capitalizing on Spain's offer.<sup>337</sup> In Milgrom's view, Spain is a country that "extinguished" her heritage.<sup>338</sup>

In Carvajal's opinion, for such purportedly lofty aspirations, this "recovery" seems to be filled with complicated intricacies and procedures that do not speak so much to a reconciliatory nature. For instance, *anousim*<sup>339</sup> or crypto-Jews who lived a double life of Judaism in the guise of converting to Catholicism, must go through a complex naturalization process.<sup>340</sup> The criterion for this process requires such applicants to have a formal conversion to Judaism for Sephardim who are interested in gaining citizenship.<sup>341</sup> While this is an improvement from previous citizenship standards since it eliminates a residency requirement that was based on a subjective

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<sup>336</sup> Carvajal, Doreen. "A Tepid 'Welcome Back' for Spanish Jews" (New York: The New York Times), 8 December 2012.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> In Hebrew this word means "the forced ones" referring to Spanish individuals forced to convert to Catholicism in fifteenth century Spain. Many *anousim* secretly continued to perform Jewish practices.

<sup>340</sup> Carvajal, Doreen. "A Tepid 'Welcome Back' for Spanish Jews."

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

standard of financial credibility and renouncing alternative citizenships, according to Carvajal the Sephardim are once again being required by Spain to make commitments and forcibly convert – this time back to Judaism. In this way, for many modern day Sephardim “gratitude turned to gloom” when considering Spain’s new legislation aimed at correcting a centuries-old historical wrong.<sup>342</sup> The fundamental opinion of many of these Sephardim can be best summed up in the words of Michael Freund, creator of the Jerusalem-based Shavei Foundation for the descendants of anousim, “This is an outrage, and it goes against the spirit of reconciliation which the Spanish government claims to cherish. How sad that instead of utilizing this opportunity to send an unequivocal message of contrition, Spain is choosing to heap further insult on injury.”<sup>343</sup> Thus, not all Sephardim are pleased with Spain’s renewed citizenship offers as a means to compensate for its past.

The question of citizenship draws attention to the “half diaspora” that characterizes some Sephardim. During World War Two, Spain was willing to let these Spanish Jews enter Spain but only for a period of thirty days. This action was simultaneously problematic and remarkable. No, Spaniard and Jew were not completely irreconcilable categories. But at the same time these Spaniards were Jews. They still remained different, a people apart who could thus could not stay

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

in Spain. Now, Spain is once again extending citizenship and inviting the Sephardim back to Spain – this time to stay. But the idea of the “half diaspora” that defines these Jews manifests itself in the negative reaction of many Sephardim to Spain’s offer. While they value their Spanish roots and heritage, many still do not feel welcome in Spain.

## **Recognition**

In light of the Spanish-Israeli diplomatic relations and modern day offers of citizenship, the question of recognition is an intriguing one. In 1962, Yad Vashem<sup>344</sup> established a commission to designate a “righteous public agency” to recognize non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust.<sup>345</sup> The gravity of this task was poetically described by Elie Wiesel,<sup>346</sup> “And so we must know these good people who helped Jews during the Holocaust. We must learn from them, and in gratitude and hope, we must remember them.”<sup>347</sup>

Ultimately, these rescuers, whatever their motivations, deserve recognition for their roles in saving thousands of Jews, Sephardic and Ashkenazi alike. At Yad Vashem, the “Heroes’

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<sup>344</sup> As the Jewish people’s living memorial to the Holocaust, Yad Vashem safeguards the memory of the past and imparts meaning for future generations. Established in 1953, as the world center for documentation, research, education and commemoration of the Holocaust, Yad Vashem is today a dynamic and vital place of intergenerational and international encounter. Yad Vashem website, [yadvashem.org](http://yadvashem.org).

<sup>345</sup> Paldiel, *Diplomat heroes of the Holocaust*, 3.

<sup>346</sup> Romanian-born Jewish-American writer, professor, political activist, Nobel Laureate, and Holocaust survivor.

<sup>347</sup> <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/search.html?language=en>

Remembrance Authority” attempts to list for posterity the names of the “Righteous among Nations”:

a unique and unprecedented attempt by the victims to honor individuals from within the nations of perpetrators, collaborators and bystanders, who stood by the victims' side and acted in stark contrast to the mainstream of indifference and hostility that prevailed in the darkest time of history.<sup>348</sup>

The official requirement for such recognition is generally based on the rescuer risking his life when providing assistance. For diplomats in particular, it is necessary to demonstrate that they acted “either in violation of clear instructions or in a way against the spirit of their instructions.”<sup>349</sup> Among the Righteous listed on the Yad Vashem website are 1612 Belgians, 831 Lithuanians, 6339 Poles—and 6 Spaniards. None of the diplomats I discussed previously are on that list (see figure 19). The particular language relating to diplomats is admittedly tricky since it is possible that Spanish diplomats were taking advantage of the ambiguity and holes in their instructions rather than explicitly violating them or risking their lives.

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.



### Statistics: Numbers of Individuals Recognized by Yad Vashem by Country

- Poland: 6,339
- Netherlands: 5,204
- France: 3,513
- Italy: 524
- Greece: 313
- Bulgaria: 20
- Spain: 6

### Yad Vashem Spanish Recognized “Righteous Among the Nations”

By 1 January 2012

#### SPAIN

<i>NAME</i>	<i>YEAR</i>
Aguirre y Otegui, Martin	2011
Faya Blasquez, Conception	2011
Propper de Callejon, Eduardo	2007
Santaella, Dr. Jose & Carmen	1988
Sanz Briz, Angel	1965

Figure 19. *Source: yadvashem.org*<sup>350</sup>

The recent timing of the majority of these recognitions and their scarcity are particularly intriguing based on the fact that countries, such as the Netherlands, have thousands of individuals

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

on this list.<sup>351</sup> It is unlikely that in a country where such a large-scale efforts to help the Sephardim took place, which undeniably took place in Spain, that only seven individuals meet the criterion set forth by Yad Vashem. Perhaps we will never know all of the individuals who aided Jews during this era, especially as it becomes more of a distant past and part of historical memory. Yet the fact that people are still just being recognized gives hope that more people will come forward and more people will be recognized for their incredibly brave actions.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, this story comes full circle. In thinking about why Spanish diplomatic heroes have not been accorded the highest recognition in Israeli collective memory, we encounter again the narrative of the Sephardic Diaspora, which is pitted against the critique of Franco's fascism. We also find repeated, in a different register, the same attention to the bureaucratic nature of a diplomatic corps. Just as Spanish diplomats operated at a distance from Franco's central government, both literally and figuratively, gaps in the hierarchy of authority and resulting space for individual action was mirrored in the process by which Israeli-Spanish diplomatic relations were eventually established. Ironically, it was diplomacy—or the lack

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<sup>351</sup> 5,204 Danish individuals have been given this honor. Perhaps the most famous of these people are Victor Kugler, Johannes Kleiman, Miep Gies, and Bep Voskuijl, the individuals who hid Anne Frank's family in Amsterdam before their discovery and subsequent deportation to Auschwitz on August 4, 1944.

thereof—that contributed to Yad Vashem’s slow pace in recognizing the saving efforts of Spanish diplomats during World War Two.

## Appendix

### Chapter 3 Timeline: France

**1862:** On **January 7**, a French-Spanish agreement was reached regarding the rights and mutual protection of interests of citizens of both countries.

**1924:** Spain issued a decree that considered the Sephardim as Spaniards.

**1939:** *Bernardo Rolland of Miota* began his term as Consul General in Paris.

1940:

-On **June 22**, France and its allies were defeated in the Battle of France and signed an armistice with Germany.

-On **October 8**, Madrid issued a decree which prevented Spanish consuls from granting transit visas without first sending all requests by telegraph to Spain.

**1941:** In **August**, Rolland appealed to the Spanish embassy and actively intervened in favor of Spanish nationals to remove them from the Drancy internment camp

1942:

-In **June**, Palencia began to describe measures taken against the Jews, such as the fact that they were prohibited from saluting to the Bulgarian flag and owning businesses.

-In **August**, the U.S. Embassy in Madrid obtained a guarantee from the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that no illegal refugees, namely Jews, would be returned to their country against their will

-Rolland successfully made it impossible for Vichy authorities to confiscate the Sephardim's property.

-Spanish-French border closed towards the **end of 1942**.

1943:

-In **February**, the Spanish consul in Marseille ignored Madrid's orders and required that label *juif* be removed from Jewish clothing.

-In **mid 1943**, Bernardo Rolland of Miota finished his term of Consul General in Paris.

-In **September**, despite Germany's pressures, Spain evacuated French citizens (some of who were Jews) from the coast of Cadiz, Algeciras and Malaga

## Chapter 4 Timeline: Greece

1912:

-Greeks conquered the city of Salonika and overtly targeted the Jews. Spain reached an agreement with the Greeks in **April of 1915** to provide conservative aid for the Sephardim residing there.

-The Spanish Empire established the Spanish protectorate of Morocco under colonial rule by the *Treaty of Fez* until **1956** when both France and Spain recognized Moroccan independence.

**1935-1936:** Spain revealed its “pro-Jewish sympathies” to a certain extent when it signed agreements with Egypt (1935) and Greece (1936).

**1941:** The Nazis officially occupied Greece, which greatly impacted the fate of the Sephardim residing there.

1943:

-In **March** the Germans began deporting Jews in Greece but made an exception for foreign nations, such as Spanish Jews holding a valid Spanish passport

-In **mid April** the new consul general *Sebastian Romero Radigales* took over in Athens

-The Germans issued an ultimatum **on April 30<sup>th</sup>** that had a timeline of six months. It suggested the repatriation of citizen Jews before the **15<sup>th</sup> of June** of 1943, as there would be an “increase in the general actions against the Jews in the zone of Salonika” (Martín de Pozuelo, 100).

-On **July 16<sup>th</sup>**, the Spanish embassy in Berlin telegraphed the German ambassador to the legation of Athens with new instructions rejecting the repatriation of Spanish Jews except for in special cases

-On **July 29<sup>th</sup>**, the Germans transported 367 Spanish Jews of Salonika to a local ghetto to await shipment to Bergen-Belsen

-In **October of 1943**, 155 Spanish Jews in Athens were arrested and deported despite Radigales' protests

**1944:** On March 24<sup>th</sup>, Radigales unsuccessfully tried to release 350 arrested Greek Jews in Bergen-Belsen.

**1946:** Franco sought admission to the U.N. and Israel played a crucial role in its veto abilities to deny Spain admission from this institution and subsequently from receiving aid from the Marshall plan.

## **Chapter 5 Timeline: Bulgaria**

1940:

-*Julio Palencia* became the Spanish minister in Sofia.

-In **December**, Bulgaria approved a wide anti-Semitism legislation

**1941:** Bulgaria agreed to be complaint with the Nazis so that Hitler could bring his troops en route to offensives against both Yugoslavia and Greece.

**1942:** The Germans offered an ultimatum in July stating that the Jews Shortly following these laws; Jews who did not abandon the country by **September 1<sup>st</sup>** would be subjected to the same conditions as the Bulgarian Jews

**1943:** Julio Palencia ended his term as Spanish minister in Sofia and was declared *persona non grata* in Bulgaria and forced to flee.

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